

PROOF

# 1

## Introduction

### What's wrong?

Has humanism outlived itself? Humanism can be characterized as an attitude to life based on reason, autonomy and self-knowledge of the human individual, recognition of universal human rights and values, and the belief in the betterment of the human being, mostly on the basis of its own efforts. While it arose in the Renaissance, it received much of its substance from the Enlightenment. There is a disenchantment, a disappointment and a scepticism born of the inequities of the imperialism of the nineteenth century and the horrors of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century; and there is even a stream of anti-humanism. What remains of humanism if, in spite of the Enlightenment, or perhaps even partly because of it, humans turn out to remain capable of excesses of inhuman behaviour? The Holocaust and the Gulag were shocking not just for their scale of murder but for the systematicity and design of it – as parts of grand, idealistic projects to improve humanity. According to the well known saying of Lyotard, the disillusion from this put an end to our 'grand narratives'. And how humanistic are neo-liberal market economies? Most extreme in his denunciation of humanism and the Enlightenment was Theodor Adorno, with his saying that 'in the inner abode of humanism, as its very soul, rages a locked up tyrant, who as fascist turns the world into a prison' (2003, p. 100, my translation). Adorno's criticism is grossly exaggerated; however, answers are required to justified criticism of earlier humanism.

Much violence has been inspired by theistic religion – not least by the Christian religion – in persecutions, pogroms, torture and crusades; but now, having rejected such religion, and despite following the Enlightenment, humanistic secular modernity also turns out to be accompanied by violence – no less outrageous than previously and, perhaps, even more so. What is it, then, also in humanism, that allows for this or even contributes to it? I will argue that the root of much evil goes deeper than the Enlightenment and resides in Platonic dreams of unworldly universality and purity, of the

2 *Beyond Humanism*

truth being divine, and of a single God or fundamental principle being the unique truth – all of which were part of both theistic religion and the Enlightenment. It is part of a flight from the horror of the finitude of life and the vulnerability of the human condition in an unjust, unruly world to a heaven of universal, eternal truth and goodness. The goodness that is perceived here is seen as universal, and since it is attached to the single God that is one's own, those who think otherwise are outside goodness, are therefore evil, and to maintain purity they must be relentlessly persecuted, suppressed, expelled or exterminated.

I prefer a more Aristotelian tradition in philosophy, which recognizes human frailty, the inability of people to reach absolutes of the good and the true, the illusion of eternal universals, the tragedies that follow wrong choices, conflicting interests and purposes, and, in view of all this, a taste for moderation with, as Nussbaum (1986) put it so well, an awareness of the human 'fragility of goodness'. Humanity is driven by natural instincts towards evil, but it helps not to be afflicted also by the cultural virus of Platonism. It matters a lot when inevitable strife is not necessarily a fundamentalist battle of the supreme good against absolute evil.

While humanism recognizes the need to respect others and to take their interests into account, and to practise benevolence, it is taken as given that the individual, the self, is central and the point of departure. That of course is not new. That was the case from the beginning of Western philosophy, with the ancient Greeks and Romans – in Socrates, the Epicureans and the Stoics. What is new is that since the Enlightenment the self is seen as autonomous, free (in choice and action), rational and transparent to itself. In Kant's famous words, the Enlightenment is a growing out of self-inflicted adolescence ('Unmündigkeit'), the inability to serve one's reason without guidance by others. I will turn this around in the claim that our reason is limited by bias from the self, and for its constitution the self requires the other human being. I will discuss the Enlightenment in Chapter 2.

Romanticism opposed the stark rationalism of the self of the Enlightenment, claiming pride of place for feelings and expression of the self, and opposing an autonomy of the self, which is now seen as rooted in a shared national spirit. I discuss this also in Chapter 2. I will oppose the individualism of both the Enlightenment and Romanticism, which together regressed into egotism, greed and narcissism, a position which is morally and socially untenable. It is also untenable from the perspective of cognition and language. Therefore I propose a modified humanism, or a step beyond humanism, oriented more towards the other – towards the relation between self and other – not so much in terms of shared interest or moral obligation, as offered by the Enlightenment, nor in terms of collective culture, as offered in Romanticism, but in terms of the formation of the self. I argue, in Chapter 4, that at its highest level freedom includes freedom from the self and from one's own prejudices; and for that one needs an opposition from the other.

If humanism is seen as committed to a centration of the self, then that is perhaps the central problem of humanism. The turn to the other becomes anti-humanist when it is a turn to a collectivity in which the differentiation of individuals is erased, as in the interest of a state or ideology, such as in Nazi and communist totalitarianism. Here lies the source of twentieth-century evil: in the erasure of human individuality for the sake of abstractions and universals in collectives of state, race, nation or system. I am a humanist in resisting that.

### Which humanism?

'Humanism' is a wide concept with different meanings. While its roots lie much earlier, the term was applied to a stream of intellectual activity in the Italian Renaissance that deviated from scholasticism and was directed to the study of the (Greek and Roman) classics. That activity was not anti-religious or anti-clerical and was conducted, among others, by priests and officials attached to the papal court. Later, in the Enlightenment, the humanism of the Renaissance was criticized for its distortion of classical texts by a subordination to the convention and maintenance of Christian faith (Israel 2008). One can say, I think, that humanism did not come into its own until the Enlightenment. However, it was recognized then that among pre-Socratic Greek philosophers (e.g. Xenophanes, Strato) there were precursors to some of the basic ideas proposed by Spinoza that defined the 'radical Enlightenment' (Israel 2008).

Nowadays the most current meaning of 'humanism' is an attitude to life based on reason, autonomy and self-knowledge of the human individual, and the belief in the betterment of the human being, mostly on the basis of its own efforts. Also, according to this view, everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and to have the opportunity to flourish and be 'authentic'. 'Humanism' has acquired the connotation of a rejection of divine and other supernatural powers in a secular naturalism.

From the beginning, with the classical Greeks, the agenda of humanism was, sometimes implicit and sometimes denied, to maintain a barrier against barbarism, violence, popular frenzy or a breakdown of culture. In this it was conservative and aimed to subdue and tame people (Sloterdijk 1999). We also find in this conservatism an endeavour to lock humanism into a narrow, disciplined, fixed and elitist canon of Western classical writers and forms of thought (Bloom 1987). Here, perhaps, lie some of the roots of the disconcerting combination of humanistic culture and imperialism (Said 1994). This humanism becomes a form of smugness (Said 2004, p. 54), and its conservatism freezes the flourishing of life. Nietzsche, in particular, militated against humanism for that reason. However, one can conceive of a humanism that supports the flourishing of life, while resisting imperialism, as I aim to show in this book.

4 *Beyond Humanism*

Why maintain the term 'humanism' in going beyond it? Because what I am aiming at still maintains several of the features of past humanism, as I will show below. In particular, I take the striving for freedom and justice to be the core purpose of humanism, and that I preserve. However, as I argue in Chapter 4, included in freedom is freedom from the self, by way of self-criticism and openness to new ideas and new forms of culture. Said (2004, p. 47) has also argued that 'critique should be situated at the very heart of humanism'.

A fundamental issue is whether humanism is necessarily, in all its forms, at odds with religion in any form. I don't think it is. I think that the human being craves transcendence, not necessarily in a metaphysical sense but in the sense of a reaching beyond the self towards something one cannot fully grasp (Levinas 1993, p. 190). In so far as humanism denies the need and possibility of transcendence I am not a humanist. Being conscious of the finitude of life and its vulnerability to arbitrary, contingent forces, the human being is overcome by anguish. The fear of death and fear of existence and its apparent lack of sense has caused the human being to seek solace and a sense to this puny life beyond the self and its being in the world. I will argue that, for several reasons, the flourishing of life that humanism seeks entails a going beyond one's own life towards that of others and towards what one leaves behind after life. The only hereafter we have is the world we leave behind when we die, and that is worth living for.

### Which transcendence?

Is transcendence always religious? Here I follow a characterization of religion<sup>1</sup> as self-transcendence in a feeling and belief in a connection, a tie of the human being, to something divine or higher than the self that is 'holy', i.e. cannot be fully grasped and is awesome. This stops short of the definition of religion as used, among others, by the sociologist Durkheim, which also includes a set of moral rules, a community of faith, a church and rituals (Joas 2007, p. 68). Islam has a God but not a church, and Buddhism has no God. Transcendence is also related, I think, to the sense and experience or grasp of time as never ending, in the sense of eternity, or as a standing still, a suspension, a stepping out of time. That can be sought in an eternal being outside the world and human life, or as an experience within life in moments of feeling out of time, as time being arrested, of ecstasy, of being outside oneself.

Should transcendence be sought outside life, in God or in life? In Dutch and in German there is a distinction between 'religion' on the one hand and 'godservice' ('Gottesdienst' in German, 'godsdienst' in Dutch) as a name for theistic religion on the other. There can be religion without belief in God in any customary sense. Transcendence does not imply that there 'is something' for the self beyond life, it can be part of life, though in life one can aim beyond it, to the life of others and to what one leaves behind after

# PROOF

*Introduction* 5

life – and that brings us closer to humanism. I am afraid that transcendence beyond the flourishing of the life of self and others, in God or metaphysical principles, would bring us back to the Platonic dreams of the absolute, universal and pure that have produced so much horror in the world. The flourishing of life does not entail a fixed identity of the self as Taylor (2011) suggests, but, crucially, entails a development and shift of identity.

The flourishing of life can be transcendent in four senses: as being engaged in shifting identity; as feeling out of time; as oriented to the life of others; and as oriented towards what one leaves behind after life. I am asserting that there is an ‘immanent transcendence’, which, though sounding like a contradiction in terms, is a transcendence that is not transcendence, a going beyond life that does not go beyond life. The strict separation of immanence and transcendence is an invention of Latin Christianity (Taylor 2011), and we do not necessarily have to accept it. I am saying that life may go beyond the life of the disconnected self that is secular, i.e. in linear time, to a life oriented towards others as well as self, towards what we leave behind after life, a life that shifts our identity and may go outside linear time, in an experience of time standing still. Perhaps at death we experience time standing still, which then subjectively is the same as entering eternity. And if it is true, as some say, that that moment lasts forever, then, as our life flashes past, if it has been a bad life, then that moment may be like eternal damnation.

Transcendence through God tends, and is intended, to soothe fears and the anguish of life and death, and some philosophers question whether that is a good thing. Should the human being be soothed to snooze in contentment and reassurance, or should one, to attain transcendence, stand on the brink of the abyss of anguish and fears, face them head on and exhaust them, in life on earth, so as to rise beyond the self? That is the view of existential philosophers such as Nietzsche (1844–1900), Heidegger (1889–1976) and de Beauvoir (1908–86), who derive the meaning of life from a transcendence of the self from within, from existence, from being in the world, not from an outside God or a metaphysical principle. They see solace and sense beyond human existence as a chimera, a distraction from what matters and an obstacle to the flourishing of life and genuine existence. If humanism seeks this immanent transcendence, then in that sense I am a humanist.

Can the self transcend itself by itself? In this book I will argue that in life and in transcendence the self need not, indeed cannot, be central, cannot exist in isolation. If humanism does assert that then I am, again, not a humanist. If existentialism asserts that then I am not an existentialist. Most of this book is dedicated to the argument that the self cannot achieve immanent transcendence in life by itself but requires the other human being: transcendence can be immanent within life in relations between people (horizontal), not in a connection with God and heaven (vertical).<sup>1</sup>

Depending on which meaning of humanism one takes this book can be seen as a criticism of humanism and a philosophy that goes beyond it, or

as moving along in a critical stream within humanism. On the one hand I go along with the humanist endeavour of striving for the flourishing and authenticity of the human being, human dignity, human rights, freedom from suppression and a criticism of religion in the sense of 'godservice'. On the other hand I am critical of the humanist, Enlightenment inspired supposition of rationality, self-knowledge and autonomy of the human being, the pretension of progress and control of one's future and excessive universalistic pretensions. I resist the obsession with the happiness or well-being of the self, of the 'disengaged individual' as Charles Taylor calls it (I will employ his work extensively in later chapters). That leads to a neglect and even an eclipse of the importance of the other human being, for its own sake as well as its importance for the self, and as a result also for the flourishing of the self, or so I will claim.

I will argue that the self is fragmented and imperfectly known, not even identifiable with itself, and that it needs interaction with others to form an identity. The self needs the other to transcend itself. In other words, it needs the other for its being and its becoming. It needs the other to fill the spiritual void of widespread present day narcissism (Lasch 1991). The self needs the other not as a mirror and confirmation of its self but for transcendence and replenishment of an empty self, for the discovery and acceptance of its limitations and the limits of gratification. The human being can flourish only by reaching out to others and by being reached by others. This requires a 'putting between brackets of the self' (what Levinas calls 'passivity') to open oneself to the other, and a view of the other as a fathomless source that the self can never fully grasp, and which as a result is an object of awe. It requires empathy and (a certain degree of) altruism. Counter to Levinas (and most other philosophers) I will argue that not only the instinct for survival and self-interest but also an instinct for empathy and altruism are part of human nature, as a heritage from evolution, and I will disagree with Levinas on other points as well. Nevertheless, I derive inspiration from him in my view that human flourishing requires not an inward turn to the self but, on the contrary, an outward turn to the other human being, a release from the self, a freedom from the self, not in God but in the other, precisely because the other is different from the self. My argument can be summed up in the following motto: being is becoming, becoming is interacting, and interacting is ethics.

Levinas goes too far in surrendering and subjecting the self to the other, as a 'hostage' as he says literally. Schopenhauer said that to avoid egotism one must erase any distinction between self and other, and surrender and dissolve the self in a Buddhist absorption into the One that equals the All. I resist that. I claim and argue that altruism, empathy and opening up to the other contribute to the flourishing and enhancement of the life of the self, not its denial or surrender. For the flourishing of life I derive inspiration from Nietzsche. I sail a course that might seem impossible, between Nietzsche and Levinas.

## Philosophical roots

One of the meanings of humanism is that it sees man as ‘the measure of all things’, an idea that goes back to the classical Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras (c.490–420 BC). Here lies one connection of humanism with the ancients. An underlying assumption of humanism, going back to Plato, is that the true is the good: knowledge contributes to well-being and freedom. In fact, however, untruth and deceit can contribute to survival, and current social psychology and brain science tell us that there is no full free will, that our actions are to a large extent driven by unconscious drives that we have little knowledge of. To unravel this I will discuss free will and cognition in Chapters 4 and 5. The conclusion will be that knowledge and rational analysis feed into the unconscious processes of the will and affect the outcome even if we don’t control the will. Knowledge does widen the opportunities for choice, reduces our subjugation to decisions made for us by others, and in that sense contributes to freedom.

The idea that the true is the good entails a faith in progress: increasing knowledge will yield increasing good. This has yielded ‘modernity’: the ascendance of science, technology and socio-economic systems of design, planning and organization based on measurement and control. In fact, however, while there can be little doubt of technical progress, progress in spirituality, humanity and society is dubious. In this book I will not engage in any dispute with science and technology. Technology is not intrinsically bad, any more than, say, language is. Technology gives leverage to violence, war and destruction, but so does language. In both cases one can do good with it as well as bad. I will argue, however, that social and economic systems cannot flourish under extremes of measurement and control, are tragic in the failures of their success, are perverse in their systemic effects, and require openness to variety, heterodoxy, deviance, uncertainty, ambiguity, mistakes and failures.

In the history of philosophy two rival approaches have persisted. One, going back to the pre-Socratic ‘sophists’ is based on rhetoric: human debate in a clash of opinions, based on knowledge and insight that derive from human experience and its change in the relations of man to the world (Copleston 1962, vol. 8, part II, p. 99). Knowledge is action in that truth is not fixed and given a priori but is developed in action, in work, in time. In later philosophy this tradition is found, for example, in philosophical pragmatism, according to which ideas are useful fictions that one adopts for action and adapts in action. It is also found in existential philosophies, as in Heidegger’s emphasis on being as a process in time (in his *Being and Time*).

The other tradition, going back to Plato (c.428–c.348 BC), despises ‘mere opinion’, mystical or poetic evocation and revelation, and reaches for absolute, universal, timeless truth in a ‘heaven of ideas’ beyond reality and for rigorous argument. Knowledge is seen according to a visual metaphor as a tranquil contemplation of immovable truths where all movement must

cease. The power of the visual metaphor is exhibited in our saying, in daily language, 'I see' to mean 'I understand'. This Platonic tradition has been very powerful and is found, to a greater or lesser extent, among the philosophers of the early Enlightenment, such as Descartes (1596–1650), Spinoza (1632–77), Leibniz (1646–1716) and Locke (1632–1704), and many later philosophers, notably Schopenhauer (1788–1860). The ideal lies in a philosophy as final and rigorous as mathematical proof.

Both traditions have yielded brands of humanism. I may be a humanist in the sense related to the first tradition, associated with pragmatism and, as I will explain, with existentialism. I am critical of the second brand, associated with the Enlightenment.

There are elements of humanism in other and earlier civilizations than those of the West, e.g. in ancient China (Chen 2009). Buddhism has elements of humanism, in its rejection of an outside, metaphysical god and submission of the human being to authority, in its exercise of reason and the search for truth, tolerance, benevolence and empathy with respect to other beings. In the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions we find mystical streams, such as the Jewish Kabbalah and Islamic Sufism, which are humanistic in the sense that people find God not outside the human being but deep inside their souls, in individual, subjective experience of transcendence or ecstasy. I discuss this further in Chapter 2.

Western humanism is also rooted in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romanticism. In Chapter 2 I discuss and criticize the Enlightenment as well as Romanticism. I criticize the radical stream in the Enlightenment (Spinoza, Bayle, Diderot, d'Holbach, Condorcet) for its exaggeration of rationality, transparency, autonomy and disconnectedness of the individual and for its neglect of the social in cognition and ethics and of the habits and other institutions in society. I also agree with the criticism made by others of its excess of universalistic pretensions, including the idea of the universal human being and a universal morality, which leads to a neglect of diversity and individuality of people. I share this criticism with, for example, Nietzsche and Levinas, and Horkheimer and Adorno, though I am not as radical in my criticism of the Enlightenment as the latter two are. I criticize the moderate mainstream Enlightenment (Descartes, Locke, Newton, Voltaire) for their dualism of body and mind that leads to neglect of the body and the unconscious in cognition, in feelings, instincts and bodily impulse (recognized in the radical stream, notably by Spinoza). However, I and most other people would not want to go back and surrender the Enlightenment values of reason, freedom and human rights.

In part, nineteenth-century Romanticism was a critical reaction to the universalism and rationalism of the Enlightenment. It sought the uniqueness of individuals or nations, took a turn inside and wanted to listen to the voices of nature in the human being. In self-realization and self-transcendence, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger sought recognition of existential

experience next to reason, feelings next to rationality, imagination, art, authenticity of the individual and its expression. This contributed in a different way to the rise of the self.

All this has ultimately led to egoism, narcissism and indifference of people towards each other and towards public causes. The demand for recognition of the individual, in a rebellion against dehumanized universals, was justified, but it has led to an obsession with personal preferences, rights and grudges, to the neglect of the common good and the rights of others. Populist politicians have mobilized this, exploiting resentment and prejudice, in a revival of nationalism and intolerance that is destroying human rights.

Inner voices have become voices from a void. The urge towards authenticity has led to overestimated expectations of the potential of the self, a misplaced feeling of having a right to its realization, and a narcissistic denial of limitations to achieve an unrealistic potential (Lasch 1991).

I and most other people would not want to go back and surrender to a recognition of existential experience alongside reason, and surrender the striving for authenticity and self-realization. Like some Romantics I am critical of parts of Enlightenment thought and I also seek recognition of the individual against the dehumanizing potential of universals, though in a way that does not finish up in narcissism – by shifting the orientation away from the self and towards the relation between the self and others.

### The rise and fall of the self

My main point of criticism of much humanism concerns its preoccupation with a rational, autonomous, perspicacious and disconnected self. According to Todorov (1998) next to autonomy of the self and universality of human rights also orientation to the other is part of the core of humanism, and for that he used the term 'horizontal transcendence', as I do. According to my reading of the literature, however, that orientation to the other is limited and superficial, not fundamental, and is clearly subordinate to the autonomy of the self, even with Montaigne (1533–92). What I mean by the more fundamental importance of the other for the self will become apparent in the course of this book.

To trace the rise of the self I will use the work of Charles Taylor (his *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*). Here I give a short account and in Chapter 3 a more detailed one.

There is a paradox. On the one hand we see a secular trend of individualization, towards a narcissistic self that seeks to seize the world as a mirror of its own excellence, trying to master and dominate it to satisfy its needs and its vanity. On the other hand we see a secular trend towards massification of tastes and consumption, and depersonalization, which conforms to prefabricated identities, roles and positions. How can the two be reconciled? How can individualization go together with depersonalization?

Since 1500 a variety of movements contributed to a development of centrality and dominance of the self. With Luther the human being's own, personal faith became central, in a direct relation to God, and with expression in daily, ordinary life. This contested Catholic collectivism of faith, with the church as mediator between the faithful and an exalted God. With the Enlightenment the individual was thrown back on its own reason, with the 'I think therefore I am' of Descartes. In the radical Enlightenment, under the deep influence of Spinoza, morality was no longer ordained by God but followed from the natural instinct of the human being to pursue its own survival and manifest its self and enhance its potential (*conatus, essendi*; drive to existence). Here rational self-interest, not just as a fact of life but also as an ideal, began to develop force. It developed, in particular, in the utilitarianism of a number of British philosophers, from Locke to Bentham, and achieved its pinnacle in neoclassical economic theory.

While in the earlier Enlightenment the individual was an abstraction, with Rousseau (1712–78), in some of his work, there was an inward turn to the individual as an emotionally felt natural source of good, in contrast with corrupting influences from society, which set thought and literature on a path towards Romanticism. Rousseau turned Descartes's dictum around to 'I am therefore I think', to indicate that it is the self that construes perception, sense and interpretation in thought. Here, self-orientation developed as a non-rational, intuitive, emotional force of nature.

The notion of the self as constructing perception and interpretation developed further with Kant (1724–1804) (in his *Critique of Pure Reason*) in the radical idea that in knowing phenomena the knowing subject construes perception and knowledge of the world according to categories of thought, such as space, time and causality, which hide and prevent access to knowledge of the 'thing-in-itself' (the 'noumenon'). Here the knowing self gets separated from the world. Subsequently, in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant proposed that morality is of a different order from knowledge of the world: the self *is* a thing-in-itself and it can freely and rationally choose to adopt moral imperatives of behaviour towards the other. While with Rousseau the self has a natural striving towards benevolence, with Kant morality is a rational choice that goes against nature. Here Kant made the revolutionary distinction between 'being' in a descriptive sense as material existence, and 'being' in a moral, normative sense of conduct and the meaning of life. However, as pointed out by Horkheimer and Adorno (2010), this appears to hang in the air, for it is not grounded in Kantian criticism, but motivated by the mere desire to avoid barbarism.

Opening the avenue towards philosophical idealism in what Safranski (1987) called the 'wild years of philosophy', the German philosopher Fichte argued that Kant's assumption of the unknowable thing-in-itself was based on an inconsistent argument. The thing-in-itself or noumenon is postulated by Kant as somehow having a causal influence on knowledge of

# PROOF

Introduction 11

phenomena, even if that is formed according to categories of thought that are not part of it; yet elsewhere Kant argues that the notion of causality is part of the subjective categories. If the notion of the thing-in-itself is derived from causality, and causality is a mental construction, then, Fichte argues, the assumption of the thing-in-itself is not justified and in both knowledge and morality the self is the source of everything. The only world that makes sense is the world construed by the subject.

Schopenhauer extended Kant's scepticism concerning the 'world outside' the self. We hardly know ourselves and we are driven by unconscious drives. He granted that we know the world only as a man-made representation ('*Vorstellung*'), but we do know for sure of ourselves that we exist in our body. While we know little about ourselves we do experience ourselves and of that we are sure. Schopenhauer broke down the idealistic pretensions of reason and the knowing subject, to recognize a non-rational experience of existence in the body, as a thing-in-itself. He attributed our drives to a fundamental and largely unconscious drive of the will to exist and survive, as recognized also in earlier philosophy under the term *conatus essendi*. This initiated an existentialist stream in philosophy, developed, among others, by Nietzsche and Heidegger.

Nietzsche first criticized Schopenhauer for not being consistent in accepting Kant's point, but then, in the end he himself went ahead to postulate a metaphysical 'will to power' as the fundamental principle behind the world. Nietzsche elevated individual will to power and 'Dionysian' forces of creativity and self-transcendence, ejecting morality in the process. Schopenhauer's will is a will to satisfy cravings that are in fact never satisfied and are exercised at the expense of others. Nietzsche's will to power was not a will to survive, nor a craving for something, but an ability to command and shape, a force of growth, an increase of the power of life. In both forms of will lies a fundamental and ineradicable egotism. The difference is that Schopenhauer deplored it and sought an escape from it in a renunciation of the self, while Nietzsche celebrated it as a Dionysian source of creativity and spiritual growth. The idea that the human being is fundamentally egotistic pervades philosophy, with the notion of the *conatus essendi*, the will to exist and survive and procreate. In the human being the drive to survive, if needed at the expense of the survival of others, is intensified and carried to a different level by self-consciousness and an awareness of a future for which one must guard one's interests by building property and power. People are also felt to want to achieve selfhood by distinguishing themselves from others, in what Plato called *thymos*, which is reflected in Nietzsche's notion of will to power (Safrański 1997).

For Heidegger also, in his earlier work (of *Being and Time*, 1993) the only thing that counts, in the end, is individual self-realization and self-transcendence without regard to others or society. Later, in a paradoxical and perverse turn to connect his philosophy to Nazi ideology, he shifted

the heroic existentialist stance from the individual to the collective nation acting as one man (Safranski 1992).

Nietzsche's joyous Dionysian exuberance in thought and creation is more congenial to me than the incidental leaps from the dark desperation of being in anticipation of death, like a drowning person gasping for breath, of Heidegger's earlier philosophy. However, as history has shown Nietzschean and Heideggerian existential philosophy in combination with a neglect or even denial of morality, in a celebration of heroic intensification of feeling in the force of life and transcendence at the expense of the weak, undaring, pusillanimous majority, can contribute and has contributed to fascism.

The Romantic turn into the self in search of authenticity and expression achieved a pinnacle in the social upheaval of the 1960s and then trivialized itself in consumerism, where it became a mass phenomenon.

Some of the thought of Descartes, Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger yielded successive steps in the ascendance of the self to its throne. Over many years, in the course of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and Romanticism, the individual, the self, has been liberated from suppression by church, convention and state and has claimed a position in the centre of the 'life world', the world of life as it is experienced. Economists tell us that the private vice of egotism is a public virtue in the economy.

And now we are in a mess. We are taken aback by the results. Confused, we watch insatiable consumers, monomaniac managers, bonus grabbing bankers, indifferent citizens renouncing civic ideals, politicians seeing politics not as a calling but as a career, and overall narcissistic and exhibitionistic behaviour. We crave to be served by society without serving it in return. If we do not get our way we nurse rancour against authorities, which are decreasingly accepted as legitimate. We find others indecent but we resist curtailment of our own indecencies. The individual wants to glitter and claims a right to do so.

Ordinary life is insufficiently spectacular, or seems empty of meaning, and we seek stars and heroes to bask in the reflection of their glamour, in a parade of celebrities on TV, a circus of sports stars, pop stars, movie stars, actors, TV hosts and stage seeking politicians. Or we seek it in the heroism of the hooligan, in the mimicry of gangsta rap, in the bashing to death of a passer-by just for the kick of it. An explosion of the self in a reblossoming of fascist tendencies that are lying in wait to be exploited politically.

Authority in ethics, art and science no longer exists; each of us claims his own standards of what are the good, the true and the beautiful. Every opinion is as good as any other. Science and scholarship are often seen as pretentious and irrelevant babble, perhaps not always without reason. Facts and rational argument matter less than authenticity of expression, in 'being yourself', personal opinion and emotion. Emotions are legitimate, even part of rationality, as I will argue later (in Chapter 5), but they can also obliterate

rationality. We feel we genuinely exist only if we appear on TV, if only as a member of the audience of a show, applauding on cue. To get attention, people go to extremes of exhibitionism, hype or provocation. There appears to be a paradox: obsession with the self leads to a craving for public exhibition of experience and emotions to achieve genuine existence. In short: we revel in self-aggrandizement, conceit, egotism, impulsiveness, narcissism, disrespect and intolerance. The individual, as a basis for humanism, has fallen into inhuman behaviour.

When the self does go beyond the self, it is in a flight from the fear of death, submitting to higher, absolute powers or ideals that transcend human frailty, in religion, political ideology or nationalism. In nationalism and imperialism culture creates a collective obsession with the self and a blindness to the other. In defence of those ideals, one is prepared to submit to authority, group pressure and conformity, but this tends to be subverted into group egotism, exclusion, discrimination or submission of outsiders, fuelled by fanaticism. If you are not with us you are against us. Is there a way out between egotism and deliverance from it by submission to powers beyond humanity?

We appear to run up against the limitations of the self, to have lost our bearings and to require a new moral compass. Humanism as the enthronement of the individual has outlived itself. Levinas (1978) said that humanism needs to be rejected only because it is insufficiently human. We need a humanism that goes beyond the individual, which stretches to the other than the self, and finds humanity there. It might be called 'otherhumanism'.

### Depersonalization

Now for the paradox that next to individualization there is depersonalization. Here I partly follow the analysis of Horkheimer and Adorno (2010 [1944]), though I think their position is extreme and they misunderstood the economy. We should take into account that, writing in the 1940s, they were mostly targeting the fascist system of the Nazis. However, as they indicate, people have become ensnared in systems of mass consumption, where consumers are manipulated to conform to stereotypes, following fads and fashions. According to economists the human being is the goal, as a consumer. According to Horkheimer and Adorno the human being is an instrument, a means, and hence an object, for the sale and production of goods. In work, people are caught in systems of an increasing division of labour and 'rationalization' in standardized production that conquered industry and is now encroaching upon former 'public services' such as health care. In the division of labour the human being is broken down into capabilities so as to maximize his or her efficiency. Work is prescribed in protocols, and performance is judged according to its conformance to

those protocols. The room for professional discretion has shrunk. This is happening contrary to the insights of organizational science (on so-called 'communities of practice') that the practice of professional work is too rich and variable, with no two cases (patients) ever being identical, to be frozen in protocols. The evidence for this is that 'work to rule' is a form of sabotage. As professionals are given less leeway for judgement and case-sensitive practice, and are subjected to rules and monitoring of their conformance to those rules, they lose the sense of alertness and responsibility that is needed to diagnose and service idiosyncratic needs, so that the need for rules is confirmed and the system is consolidated.

However, innovative entrepreneurship breaks out of existing systems and the 10 per cent of innovations that do not fail open the system to new developments. Entrepreneurs grasp avenues for deviation that Horkheimer and Adorno considered to be impossible in managerial capitalism. The new directions, failures and successes, and effects of innovation are unpredictable, though this does not fit the mindset of planning, programming and risk avoidance that has captured policy thinking – and there, up to a point, Horkheimer and Adorno are right.

Perhaps the most telling example of depersonalization in history is the suspension of individual conscience in the totalitarianism of Nazism and Stalinism. Perhaps the most telling contemporary example is that of the bankers. Collectively they are caught in a behaviour that individually they confess to be destructive of financial and economic stability. Banks profit from taking risks, but when things go wrong the losses are passed on to the public. They have to play along with this perverse game so as not to lose out in the competition within financial markets. Governments submit to the public interest thus being taken hostage, since they compete among themselves for the favour of the banks.

Where does this come from? First, I think that to a large extent it lies in the structural effects of social systems, where individuals get entangled in webs of interdependence, in organizations, markets and institutions, which yield public disasters from the unintended consequences of private motives. There is no plot or evil intent but an entanglement in systems of perverse effects that are difficult to escape from. In the Prisoner's Dilemma, participants lock each other into a perverse practice. As demonstrated by Foucault, established authorities (in prisons, mental institutions, health care, education) impose their norms and routines on people, not deliberately but as a matter of course, in the conviction that this is all for their best, to internalize them and make them conform; but this results in a loss of their autonomy (see Kunneman 2009). Adorno (1975) also discussed such colonization of the self by the social structure. But even this, I think, understates the problem. Such effects are much more widespread, in the assimilation, on pain of exclusion, of intellectual paradigms, concepts, cultural values, routines and expectations, in communities, organizations, professions, industries, markets and

# PROOF

Introduction 15

nations. And this is all the more compelling in its being more general, more inadvertent, tacit and self-evident, and less specialized to specific roles or positions. I will return to this in a discussion of power in Chapter 10.

I think that Horkheimer and Adorno also correctly identified a second part of the problem. Regimentation in systems of regulation evolved from Enlightenment ideals of reason as a systemic coherence of thought, and from that followed ideals of action in systems where, in a hierarchy of echelons, the particular satisfies higher-level more-general principles, in an ascending order of universality. The underlying paradigm is that of mathematical systems of deduction from axioms or first principles, which we find in Descartes, and, applied to the world as a system, in Spinoza. Rational order entails subjugation of the particular to the general. We have not yet sufficiently understood the totalitarian, dehumanizing consequences of that. I will discuss the lure of universals in Chapter 2.

Surely, the answer is not to do away with universals. Recognizing their totalitarian potential perhaps we can take them down a notch or two, disallowing them to become absolute, allowing for their limitations and for alternatives and leaving room for transformation. That is one of the things that I try to do in Chapter 6. In economics and society that comes down to finding a way to combine rules with room for escape, efficiency with improvisation, generality with idiosyncrasy, the economic system with innovation.

A third contributing cause of depersonalization, I propose, is that the human being has an innate drive, an instinct, to seek recognition of legitimate behaviour in groups to which it perceives itself to belong, and to exhibit loyalty and conformity to the group. I discuss the possible evolutionary origins of this in Chapter 10. There I also propose that this could have arisen only in combination with an instinct to mistrust outsiders, which under perceived threat can be mobilized to fight and if necessary eradicate the outsiders. The 'outside' can refer to religion, ethnic group or culture. One prediction is that conformity to inside norms and rules is a function of a perceived crisis and outside threat. Political opportunists can manipulate this to fabricate a following. Here, a rivalry emerges between on the one hand an instinct towards preservation and maintenance of the self (the old notion of *conatus*) and self-expression and manifestation (the old notion of *thymos*), and on the other hand an instinct towards group loyalty and conformity. There is no rivalry when conformity carries an advantage to the self – at which point opportunistic conformity becomes unstoppable.

A fourth contributing cause, I think, is the following, which connects more directly with the tendency towards self-interest and narcissism. The notion of the self as a unitary, stable entity, with a given identity apart from the body or action in the world, is an illusion (Adorno 2003). The self achieves some mental coherence and stability on the basis of experience in interaction with the world that is assimilated and integrated in the

body. This is discussed in Chapter 5. Then one option is to submit to this, with the risk of letting the self be constructed according to the exigencies of the system in which one's experience is produced. Another option is to maintain the myth of a prior, unitary self. A central thesis of this book is that for its development the self needs openness to opposition from the other to achieve the highest possible degree of freedom, including a certain freedom from the self, as I argue in Chapter 4. The narcissist foregoes this, by assuming a supreme, prior self, and taking, manipulating, mastering and commanding the other as instrumental in confirming rather than changing the self, for the satisfaction of vanity and self-interest. Foregoing that source of the self, the self then becomes empty, an elusive ghost that allows no grasp of itself and seeks to fill the emptiness by grasping an outside exemplar of selfhood, as a personality by proxy, an idol of personal identity whose admiration is guaranteed. Here enters the celebrity as idol. The craze of idols is a manifestation of the emptiness of the self. In other words, the self has a tendency to depersonalize itself in the very process of individualization.

On this subject, Kunneman (2009) employs the concepts of 'identification' and 'projection' from psychoanalysis. In identification people extract images from idols, which they build into idealizations that usurp the idol more than doing justice to its specific individual humanity. In projection people unload some of their psychological refuse onto others: their doubts, fears, suspicions and buried evils.

### Religion?

Taylor's analysis of the disconnected self tends towards a conclusion that we need to revert to religion or godservice. This requires critical discussion. In Chapter 2 I discuss problems of godservice in some detail. My conclusion is this. Let us accept, at long last, that if there is a God there is nothing we can say about Him, we can know nothing about Him. We can talk of God poetically, with ontological ambiguity, leaving aside His existence in any sense. Here one can pray, even in disbelief, in expression more than address, in incantation or lament, expressing awe, hope, sorrow or despair. However, I think that godservice requires an ontological commitment to God, a belief in his existence in some form. What we do know is that we have life, which is a precious gift even if it is not a gift, and we should make the best of it. That does not mean that only the life of the self matters. People look for something beyond that, something higher than the self. But instead of personifying the highest, in an anthropomorphic God, could we not somehow elevate humanity in another way?

A central problem then is this. If we assume one God, who has created us all in his image, this makes people akin to each other, as a basis to overcome enmity, strife and war. Of course it did not actually work out that way. Rather than unifying peoples, different notions of the single God were used

to raise the level of enmity amongst them, making strife sacred amongst rival religions. Nevertheless, within societies that shared a religion it did contribute to a sense of unity and solidarity, and the pressing question is what might replace it for that purpose.

If the search for God leads us astray, as I argue in later chapters, what other forms of religion are there? According to the German philosopher Hegel (1770–1831) religion transcends the feeling of a fragmented consciousness, a fragmented humanity and a fragmented reality, elevating the individual to a feeling or vision of a higher unity. That need not be a god. For Hegel it was an absolute spirit that unfolds itself in the world. Alternatively there is the orgiastic transcendence inspired by Dionysus, the god of inebriation, an exploding self, who set Nietzsche on fire; and there is the opposite transcendence in the disappearance and dissolution of the self in the All that equates to nothingness, as in Schopenhauer, the Jewish Kabbalah, Islamic Sufism and in Buddhism.

The higher, which may perhaps be called 'holy', inspires wonder, admiration and awe and instils modesty. The higher can be the whole or part of nature, part of this world, such as the spirits of rivers, mountains, forests, as with the American Indians; or the gods of the classical Greeks, living on mount Olympus and participating in the world in a variety of guises; or the spirits of ancestors that intervene in the world, as with the ancient Chinese, for example (Schwarz 1985); or, ominously, national spirit or character. There can be religion with a belief not in God but in something else that goes beyond humanity or nature. Robert Bellah spoke of a 'civil religion' in the US, in an American cultural and political tradition, with a sacralization of symbols (Joas 1992, p. 71). The sociologist Durkheim proposed human rights as a new religion (Joas 2007, pp. 149–52). The idea of a civil religion or religion of the state goes back to Rousseau (1712–78), who in his book on the social contract inspired the Jacobinical perpetrators of the French Revolution to their terrorism of virtue. Could one then also call Nazism a religion, or should we go no further than saying that it had 'something religious' about it? Nietzsche strove for self-transcendence but can hardly be called religious. With Schopenhauer, in aesthetic contemplation, the self can momentarily escape the relentless drive of the will. Here we have art as religion. With Nietzsche also we find art as religion, but in an opposite way: not in a surrender of the self but in a celebration of it.

In this book I seek transcendence in the relation between self and other. For that I employ the 'philosophy of the other' of Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95), as set out in Chapter 8. In the philosophy of the other Levinas was preceded by Schopenhauer with his philosophy of compassion and Feuerbach (1804–72) with his philosophy of 'thou', but in Levinas it is more developed. Levinas rejected traditional notions of God as creator of the world, or as the whole of nature with its laws (as in Spinoza), or as personal and accessible, or as all-knowing and providential, with designs

for mankind, extending grace or exacting punishment and controlling evil in the world. After the Holocaust, Stalin, Pol Pot, the atrocities in Rwanda and the like, those ideas of God no longer have any credibility for Levinas, whose parents, brothers and other family members were murdered by the Nazis. Yet the tone of Levinas is religious: he derives much of his inspiration from the Bible and, mostly, from the Jewish Torah – he is labelled a ‘Jewish philosopher’. He still talks about God but not in any usual sense. He allows only for some non-ontological notion of God: there can be no comprehension of Him; we cannot have direct access to him, but ‘we hear his voice’ in the relation between self and other – that, paradoxically, this is all that survives after the death of God (Levinas 1993, p. 208). In a sense, the other has replaced God. So, perhaps we can say that Levinas is offering a ‘religion of the other’, as a link of the self to the other who is higher than the self, but which has little to do with any usual notion of God. Now it is the other human being who inspires wonder, admiration, awe and fear. The beauty of this is that the religious source of awe for the other now coincides with morality.

### Where to go?

So how can we deal, without God, with the evil and strife in the world that result from a combination of the will to survive (*conatus*) and the will to distinguish oneself (*thymos*)? One solution is that of Hobbes: the state as a Leviathan that imposes limits to the freedom of the one in order to preserve a freedom for the others. Another extreme solution is that of Rousseau’s reflections on the ‘general will’: a totalitarian state as a collective entity, with a collective will, to which individuals have to sacrifice their will to survival and differentiation. This inspired the ‘virtuous terror’ of the French Revolution and later forms of totalitarianism. Another approach is to surrender and accept the sorry condition that the world is unavoidably a state of war of all against all, and to even see this positively as a Nietzschean expression of will to power that can be sublimated into artistic and intellectual creativity. Accepting the ineradicability of evil in humanity one can revel in it and make that the purpose of life, as did de Sade, Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Bataille. One can turn to fascism’s lustor systematization and the technical perfection of evil.

Or one can engage in the liberalist dream of transforming violent strife into the creativity of economic competition and Schumpeterian creative destruction in innovation in markets and political competition in democracies, with safeguards against a concentration of power. So far, this seems the most attractive position, but there are serious failures in the market and in the democratic process, and at the level of nations capitalism can yield to imperialism and war. Liberalism takes too rosy a view of the operation of markets and democratic institutions, of the rationality of people, of their

autonomy, of their capabilities and access to requisite resources to make markets and democracies work according to their ideal. More importantly, liberalism neglects the fact that human beings are not autonomous but socially constituted; and for their self-realization and self-differentiation they need interaction with others. Liberalism neglects the tragedy of social and economic systems in which people are indoctrinated, herded and regimented, and the unintended consequences of actions in webs of interdependence.

Occasionally, philosophers have allowed for compassion as part of human nature. Rousseau was one of them, but according to him that applied only to the human being who was in an irretrievable state of nature, which was destroyed (in a 'denaturation') by society with its rivalry, economic accumulation and conflicts of interest. In the English Enlightenment Shaftesbury and Hutcheson allowed for moral sentiments, in benevolence and commitment to the common good, as part of human nature or instilled by God, next to a drive towards self-interest. Schopenhauer also allowed for an inborn penchant for compassion, which can, with great difficulty, be mobilized by turning inward in ascetic, mystical contemplation to bypass the ego and dissolve the self into a unity with the All that is nothing. Here, as in Buddhism and other mystical religions, the self is subdued by dissolving it.

There appears to be a gap in the forms of philosophical analysis which may yield a window of opportunity. In most cases, philosophers have set the individual either against a God or a metaphysical principle, or against a collective of state or nation. They have mostly set individuals against each other in the strife for survival or *thymos*. But what if in order to survive and to develop and distinguish oneself the self needs the other? In markets rivalry and the urge towards advantage is seldom without limit, and there is collaboration next to competition, and trust next to control, as a large literature on trust has shown. Without any trust so-called transaction costs would be too high for markets to work. For example, as I have argued and shown in earlier work, for performance in innovation one should collaborate to employ opportunities that arise from different, complementary knowledge and competence between people and organizations (Nooteboom 2000). Such collaboration requires empathy and benevolence. Differentiation between people and organizations is a problem but also an opportunity. The give and take required, in mutual opposition, might be part of a horizontal transcendence. I elaborate this in a discussion of the workings of trust, in Chapter 9.

As recognized among others by St Augustine, mystical introspection or immersion in the self is problematic in view of the 'treachery' involved in a fooling of ourselves with our view of ourselves – we need some anchoring outside of the self. Rather than looking to the church or state to provide this, as Augustine did, I will argue that we can find some anchoring in an interaction with other people. This connects with Wittgenstein's (1889–1951) view, in his later work, of the impossibility of a private language, of making sense without linguistic interaction with others. An individual isolated from childhood

might achieve some rudimentary coherence in the reference (denotation) of utterances, but mostly, for meaning, in consistent reference, we need others to correct our vagaries and inconsistencies of reference. I cannot have a pain and doubt it. If I have a firm opinion I cannot at the same time doubt it. I think therefore I am but I do not thereby know who I am. I can argue with myself but at some point question and answer collapse into each other and I need independent outside views or opinions to question myself. Here we have a second Kantian transcendental bind. As Kant argued, I cannot know the world as it is in itself because I look at it on the basis of mental categories that are intrinsic to human perception. I add here that I cannot know my self as it is in itself because the observer is also the observed. Metapsychics wobbles as much as metaphysics does.

Here, I turn around an argument from Heidegger's *Being and time*. There are three dimensions to a question: the sort of answer we expect; the answer; and the source of the answer. When we ask for the name of someone these three dimensions are: the notion of a name (what counts as a name); the specific name we get as an answer; and the source from which we seek an answer (the person whose name it is, an acquaintance, municipal records). Now Heidegger argues that when we ask for the meaning of our existence, we ourselves are the only source of an answer. I, by contrast, argue that such answers from the self arise largely impulsively, from our unconscious, vaguely, erratically and dependent on circumstance and our mood, in fragments, and filtered by what we may wish for or fear, or are proud or ashamed of. Perhaps we can glean the meaning of our existence better from what we see others doing, and hear them saying, in particular in response to what we are doing and saying. I will return to this in Chapter 6 on meaning.

And what if next to instincts for survival and for *thymos* the human being also has an instinct for altruism? Avoiding metaphysical speculation on this we can refer to recent developments in evolutionary theory, social psychology and brain science that give evidence of the latter. In this book I take a naturalist approach, not to discount the effects of culture and society, but to recognize that these build on the potential that human beings carry along from evolution and that the mind is rooted in the body.

### The purpose of this book

The purpose of this book, then, is to develop the idea, to fill the gap between on the one hand the individual, disconnected self and on the other hand God, some universal abstraction or a collective. Heidegger admitted that a philosopher starts not with a thought but with a 'mood' (*Stimmung* in German), which comes from character, circumstances and experience, and which guides and colours thought (Safranski 1992). In Heidegger's mood, life is a burden we carry by being 'thrown' into the world without a choice in the matter. In my mood, life is a precious gift whose potential we should

realize and develop, and which potential and the possible forms of its utilization vary, as mood does, between people and their circumstances.

A central question, posed before by Taylor (2003), is whether and how, while maintaining the good things from the Enlightenment and Romanticism, we might turn around individualism to a form that does not drown in egoism and narcissism. For that one might think of a return to religion (as Taylor is inclined to do). I am reluctant, given the negative effects of religion in the sense of godservice, deceit, suppression, intolerance and thwarting of the flourishing of life. My criticism of godservice is developed further in Chapter 2. We have had good reasons to turn away from it.

The central question for me, in this book, now becomes the following. How can we affirm the flourishing of life *and* be a good person with regard to others, without help from God? The question is primarily an ethical one, not in the first place in the sense of moral rules that need to be followed, but in the classical sense (the sense of the classical Greeks) of what the good life is in the light (or dark) of human capabilities and limitations. This I will discuss in Chapter 9. From Nietzsche we learn that we should beware of a morality that suppresses and stifles the flourishing of life. There appears to be a tension between creativity and morality. We want room for creativity but we should also escape from the current obsession with the self, egotism and narcissism. Can that be achieved only by means of a belief in God? Does the Enlightenment give an answer? My response to both these questions is: no (see Chapter 2). In the public discussion of the moral compass it seems as if we need to choose between religion and the Enlightenment, but neither offers a way out. But how, then, to proceed?

The challenge is to escape from the inane individualism of the post-modern zombie without falling into a subjugation of the individual to God, or a universal notion of humanity, or national culture or destiny. The philosophy of Levinas – of the other as a source of transcendence of the self – aims to yield a way out from this apparent impasse (Guibal 2005, pp. 151–2). For Levinas moral consciousness is not the acquisition or experience of universal values or values rooted in a community or the individual but the opening to what goes on beyond the self (Critchley 2002, p. 15). This is precisely what we need. In Levinas's thinking there are deep traces of religion, in which, however, the other human being replaces God as the source of transcendence and revelation, as object of awe and as a form of infinity given the impossibility of our being able to comprehend it fully.

We should learn that it is not a matter of opening others to our reason but of opening ours to theirs (Finkelkraut 1987, p. 81). This fundamental point forms the central theme of this book. The risk of an attempt, such as the one I make here, to redress the self-interestedness of the human being that has run out of control, is that one reverts to the sacrifice of the individual to a collective national culture or to a universal ideal that is no more than a particular vision made absolute. The path that I choose is that of an opening

to the other human being, but not in the form of a collective national other, nor the abstract universal other, but to others as differentiated individuals. I call this 'otherhumanism' to indicate that it goes beyond a humanism of the inward looking, isolated individual, to find transcendence not in the self but in the other.

In this book I attempt to develop otherhumanism as a possible way out, in a philosophy of humans for humans that shows how we can affirm life, in its creative destruction, and yet be a good person for others, without the help of God. For the 'flourishing' I turn to Nietzsche, and for the goodness without God (in any usual sense) I turn to Levinas. This combination of Nietzsche and Levinas may seem impossible, since, in spite of a number of commonalities (Stauffer and Bergo 2009), they are ethical opposites.

Nietzsche's philosophy of the flourishing of life is a source of inspiration, but it does not work because of his detachment of the self from interaction with others. I criticize Nietzsche's assumption of an autonomous individual as much as I do with regard to the Enlightenment. Nietzsche rejected belief in an outside God as a justification and source of a sense of life, because then an individual becomes estranged from life. Nietzsche internalizes religion in the creativity of the self, a turn inwards that harks back to the mystical tradition in religion.

Nietzsche's error is threefold. First, logically speaking the rejection of an outside, distant God does not leave a turn inwards as the only alternative. There is another option, of seeking a foothold for transcendence in the other, proximate human being. There has been a persistent inclination, in religion and philosophy, to hack existence into two: the self and God or the self and some collective, with nothing in-between, erasing the existence of intermediate individual human beings (Safranski 1992). Heidegger did this too, in his opposition between self and a collective 'One' ('*man*' in German). We should step out of that.

Second, Nietzsche neglects the epistemological problem that the self needs an opposition from others to realize the Nietzschean ambition of spiritual growth. To realize the potential of such spiritual growth by interaction one needs to be a master in empathy and an artist in benevolence. In that sense ethics is first philosophy, as Levinas said.

Third, the moral implications of Nietzsche's views are unacceptable. Nietzsche himself at times shrank back from the moral implications and ached to be proven wrong. Nietzsche was against nationalism, socialism and racism and can hardly be seen as a national socialist in the bud. He cannot be blamed for not foreseeing Hitler and his use of Nietzsche's philosophy to justify and perpetrate his system of evil. But we have witnessed Hitler and we cannot ignore the evil for which Nietzschean philosophy can be used. I will discuss Nietzsche in more detail in Chapter 7.

The move outside to individual, differentiated others, and not any collective other, is crucial. Heidegger recognized, as Augustine and Rousseau did,

that the self cannot exist or find itself in a disconnected self. Adorno also saw it: 'the soul that is thrown back on itself, without object as it were, petrifies into an object' (1975, p. 115; my translation). This brought Augustine to the collective of the church, Rousseau to the 'general will' to which individuality is to be sacrificed, and Heidegger to the undifferentiated collective self of a nation acting as one man. With Augustine it led to the oppression of life in clericalism, with Rousseau it led to suppressive ideologies of the state, and with Heidegger it contributed to the Nazis' brutality. A collective other erases the rich differentiation of life that forms the mainstream of self-transcendence, it shrinks to a stark, impoverished, homogeneous stereotype that eliminates all room and nourishment for transcendence of the self. Abdication from the throne of the self should not be a step into slavery to a collective.

We need to be open to others and be 'passive', i.e. restrain our will to power, our will to master, appropriate, subdue, incorporate, absorb the other – and that idea I take from Levinas.<sup>2</sup> This is an antithesis to Nietzsche's position.

There is a connection with Heidegger's later philosophy (i.e. later than *Being and Time*, in his *Letter on Humanism* of 1946) where he loosens the solipsistic activism of his earlier thought in a plea for openness and a more passive, receptive attitude. There is an amusing play of words here. In German 'it exists' is '*Es gibt*', but the latter also means 'it gives'. However, with Heidegger it is openness to 'the world' in general, and to the institutionalized other, in which individuality is erased.

I will argue that there is no contradiction between creativity and morality, as Nietzsche suggested. Creativity is fed by dialogue and intersubjective opposition, which in order to work requires an orientation towards the other, with empathy and benevolence. The human being can only transcend his or her own ego in the humanity of the other. Hence the term 'otherhumanism'.

With Levinas, however, the self is in danger of losing itself and its flourishing in the other. He also neglects further others (third and more parties) and runs into problems there, as I discuss in Chapter 8. In the relation with a single other, third and more parties have to be taken into account. A third party can obstruct or exploit a relation with the other, but it can also facilitate it. With multiple others effects arise from a network structure. The phenomena that arise become particularly evident in the analysis of trust between people. This is discussed in Chapter 9.

The problem of finding a way out from a position lying between Nietzsche and Levinas can be put in another way. How can we reconcile striving for power (Nietzsche) with other-directedness (Levinas)? This is discussed in Chapter 10.

In summary, in this book I will argue that the flourishing of the life of the self *requires* openness to others and benevolence. I also argue that the flourishing of life *entails* such benevolence and openness. Clearly, in our limited life we cannot possibly have all the insights, experiences, feelings

and wisdom that are possible, and which other people do experience from their variety of talent, character and life path, so that by engaging with others and facilitating their flourishing we participate in it and thereby extend and deepen our own. We have an instinct to do this with regard to family but I think the instinct also goes beyond that, and we can develop this by cultural means. Engaging in the lives of others, in other-life, we may also engage in a contributing to what we leave behind after life, in the only afterlife we can be sure about.

Immersion in the other, by an empathy that one can develop, furthers knowledge and insight, intellectually and morally. One learns by trying to assimilate into one's cognition (in a wide sense including morality) what others say and do, and to 'accommodate', i.e. transform one's thought where that fails. In other words, in trying to receive the other in me, I adapt to him or her. The better one is at empathy the better it works. Empathy is the ability to imagine oneself in the position, thought and feeling of another (as other, not as me in place of the other). Identification goes further, in a convergence between self and other, in a sense of shared destiny and in similarity of thought and judgement, though this is not necessary. Full identification is also impossible, as both Nietzsche and Levinas claimed, but precisely because of that one cannot appropriate the other, who for that reason remains a source of transcendence and of awe.

Empathy is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Altruism is needed for the reaching and being reached of self and other, and I will argue that it exists and is viable, within limits. One makes sacrifices for the sake of others, but not at the price of self-destruction or self-denial. Levinas (in his later work) went overboard in claiming that the self is to be unconditionally subjected to the other as a 'hostage'. That would take us back to self-denial. I will argue for the viability of altruism, in evolution, society and the economy, at several places in this book.

Otherhumanism demands and supports a different society from our current one. Not just tolerance but active appreciation of diversity, including an unrelenting drive to honour and employ it, in sufficient but never full mutual understanding, and to develop the capability to do that. No longer to be the boss, to impose one's meaning, to control, to take over, but to leave the other in his or her being that is becoming, and to exercise and deepen empathy and altruism. Even in the economy the future is for those who can collaborate with those who think and judge differently. I will develop this argument later.<sup>3</sup>

### Philosophy

What fascinates me, especially in philosophy, is how views vary, diverge, converge, change, are transformed, return in novel forms, cross and combine again. As a result, this book may become too rich for the taste of some or

# PROOF

Introduction 25

perhaps many, and it may seem too eclectic. However, there is considerable coherence: for example in the connections amongst pragmatism, embodied cognition, Nietzsche, Foucault, Wittgenstein, naturalism and evolution. In particular, a central theme is change – change of knowledge and meaning – in an erratic process of improvisation that yields transformation, a shift of prior ideas and meanings, certainly not of an unfolding of some prior essence. This is what pragmatism, embodied cognition, Nietzsche's 'genealogy' (adopted by Foucault), (the later) Wittgenstein and evolution have in common.

While I need to use and quote philosophers, this book is not intended primarily as a treatise for philosophers, but for a wider audience; and I am trying to keep the argumentation simple, direct and transparent. In the interpretation of both Nietzsche and Levinas there are complexities and ambiguities that require discussion, but I will bother the reader with them as little as I can. A fuller justification for philosophers I will have to offer elsewhere. Therefore, I will also limit references to the literature to what I see as the minimum required. In this book I inevitably run into old, fundamental philosophical questions concerning the world, being, human existence, knowledge, truth, meaning, self and society, ethics and freedom, and I could not possibly answer all these questions here. I am rather conducting a reconnaissance and some skirmishes around them, collecting pieces of intelligence that I may use, to meet them more head-on in the future.

I will not take the work of Nietzsche and Levinas as known to the reader, and where needed I will try to explain it, in so far as I think I have understood it, which, especially in the case of Levinas, is not obvious. Levinas is also interesting for his attempts to escape from prejudices of thought that lie in misleading metaphors based on our dealing with physical objects, in our evolution and in our daily life. So it is not easy, in an attempt to escape from the prejudice of knowledge, not to fall into mysticism and metaphysics. But we should be aware that the apparently self-evident knowledge and 'hard facts' that we wish to stand on in avoiding a drift into metaphysics is based on tacit understandings or assumptions about the world, in concepts and cognitive constructions, that also constitute a metaphysics, which is all the more dangerous because it is tacitly taken for granted as self-evident, as something that it would be crazy to doubt. As a result, however, a problem for understanding Levinas is that (in his later work *Other than Being, Beyond Essence*) he is taken by the idea that what is said ('*le dit*') is a petrification and distortion of meaning as it arises in the saying ('*le dire*'). Yet, paradoxically, he wants to have it said. Not really wanting to say what one has said of course does not make for clarity of understanding. Thus I cannot always grasp what he has said, though one may have a glimpse of what he is trying to say, and perhaps that is precisely what he wants.

However, I do not want to bother the reader too much with this shadow-boxing. My intention is not to give a complete, systematic survey or criticism

of Nietzsche and Levinas but to give what I make of their work, right or wrong, for the purpose of this book. In other words I may be guilty of giving a 'creative interpretation'. Yet I do try to stay as close as I can to what I think they mean, though it is more important that what I make of them contributes to the argument of this book than whether my interpretations are 'the correct' ones (whoever may judge that). There would be little added value in only gathering, storing and spreading information. As Montaigne once said: 'a belly full of meat has little value if the meat is not digested and transformed into you' (1965 [1580], part I, p. 210).

### The contents of this book

In Chapter 2, I give more detailed criticism of religion, the Enlightenment, nationalism and post-modern relativism. I discuss my approach as an attempt to stay close to naturalism, especially an evolutionary perspective, while accepting that some metaphysics is inevitable. I will give a critical discussion of evolution. My view of knowledge and action is that of philosophical pragmatism, i.e. the work of Charles S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and Hans Joas. Note that here pragmatism is not the purely instrumental view of knowledge as oriented only towards practical usefulness, economic value and survival, as criticized by Horkheimer and Adorno. It is intended as the view that ideas are makeshift and change as they are applied.

In Chapter 3 I will give a more detailed overview of the history of the 'disconnected' self. That is what we are up against. Of course self-orientation far preceded the Enlightenment, going back to the ancient Greeks and Romans (Socrates, the Epicureans, the Stoics), as discussed by for example Michel Foucault. Horkheimer and Adorno (2010) have traced the emergence of the rational, autonomous individual, in opposition to magic and myth, as far back as Homer's *Ulysses*. In Catholicism religion was communal; in Protestantism it became more individual. In the Enlightenment the self freed itself from the institutionalized authority of church and state and began to see itself as autonomous, confident in its own rationality, and orientation towards others was based on rational self-interest and utility – or on the rational choice of Kant's categorical imperative. Others were to be taken into account and might even be seen as not only instrumental but as ends in themselves, but they were not seen as a source of the self.

Because freedom of the self plays such a large role, in Chapter 4 I proceed with a discussion of levels of freedom, taken from the literature on the existence or not of free will. I argue that, paradoxically, the self must restrain itself for there to be an openness and receptiveness towards the other in order to access the highest form of freedom. There is a connection here with Michel Foucault's notion of technologies of self, but with an emphasis on the role of dialogue. I also attach a discussion of self-interest and altruism,

# PROOF

*Introduction* 27

partly to eliminate misunderstandings, particularly in and with regard to economics: how can they go together and how are they at odds?

Because cognitive competencies, limitations of the self and the role of relations between people play an important role, in Chapter 5 I will discuss cognition. What are the sources and limitations of knowledge? Here central issues are the nature of the self: as a source, subject and object of thought; the relation between subject and object; the relation between what comes from inside, in cognitive construction, and what comes from outside, in experience. I endorse a perspective of 'embodied cognition', where knowledge is intertwined with feelings and emotions, is formed and messed up by bodily processes, and consequently is to a large extent unconscious. This view is, as I will argue, attractive in itself and has the added benefit of being consistent with modern insights from neural science and social psychology. Associated with this I take a social constructivist view according to which cognitive categories emerge from interaction with others. This view of cognition being built from action is consistent with pragmatist and existential views in philosophy. It entails cognitive variety between people to the extent that they have developed their cognition along different life paths. I employ a logic of discovery (or invention), derived from earlier work, in which knowledge is created in interaction between people, in the process of transferring and assimilating knowledge to and from others and in the process accommodating one's own knowledge. The basic idea goes back to the developmental psychologist/genetic epistemologist Jean Piaget.

Because language plays an important role in thought and, of course, in communication between self and other, in Chapter 6 I will discuss language and meaning. I pick up Ludwig Wittgenstein's view of the impossibility of a private language due to the need for the other in the building and exercise of meaning. In an account of the order of language and the disorder of speech I employ the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Michel Foucault. Another claim here is that our thinking is shaped by metaphors taken from ordinary experience with material objects and their movement in space that are fundamentally misleading in abstract realms such as thought, feeling, language, meaning and the like. Our ontology misleads us.

Another central issue is the relation between universals (such as the notion of a chair) and the specific individuals subsumed by it (the particular chair you are sitting in). I follow the nominalist tradition in philosophy that universals are notional, not real. We should beware of universals: that they are false and temporary. Universals are false in leaving out particulars that constitute life and experience and which may be crucial in any specific situation, as a matter of life or death. We need universals that do not imprison, are not coercive. We need to keep universals open, to relativize judgements, to allow for special pleading, and to maintain a keen eye and ear to new and shifting individualities that go outside the existing order. In line with pragmatist and existentialist philosophy, I argue that meaning arises in the

specificities of life, in the richness of human experience. We need to put 'justice' in quotation marks to remind us of its imperfection. Meanings and the notion of justice are always temporary and in ongoing formation. Levinas has already offered this line of reasoning. In an account of the relation between universals and individuals I employ, perhaps in an unorthodox fashion, the notions of sense and reference from the work of Gottlob Frege. I connect this with how meanings change, along the 'hermeneutic circle', and how knowledge changes, along the cycle of discovery (also to be discussed in Chapter 6). Sense builds reference, and novel reference shifts sense. And more simply: this interaction between the universal and the specific is also the core principle of scientific method. The aim is not to do away with universals, which we cannot do without. We need universals to learn from specific conditions and generalize, utilizing knowledge for novel conditions, where universals must become individualized again, but in new forms. We need abstraction in universals to make connections, to trace causes, to have science and technology, and to strive for justice. The universal rights of mankind are an important acquisition. Without universals we would fall back into extreme relativism, we could no longer make judgements, and we could no longer have debates about the good, the true and the beautiful. But again and again universals must be brought down to specificity, and in that process they are prone to shift. They are stepping stones which we step away from.

In order to proceed, I draw inspiration from Nietzsche and Levinas. They have a number of things in common with each other and with what I say in the chapters on cognition and language: embodied cognition; rejection of God (in any usual sense); rejection of supernatural sources of hope and consolation; responsibility of the human being for him or herself; going against traditional notions of rationality, consciousness and the self as self-transparent; renewed appreciation for the specific, the individual, in opposition to universals; and the impossibility to identify fully and become equal with others. Also, they both try to get away, though in very different ways and with different outcomes, from the dominance of the *conatus essendi*, the primordial and overriding natural urge of human beings to survive and to guard the resources needed for survival. However, of central importance for the present book is that they deviate radically from each other in their views on the relation between self and other, and in their ethics.

For criticism of especially Christian morality, certain ideas of the self and of knowledge, and for the search for the dynamics of the self, I first turn to Nietzsche, in Chapter 7. He rejects the *conatus essendi* in favour of will to power as the basic urge of human beings that overrides the urge to survive. The will to power may be sublimated to replace violence and subjugation of others by a Dionysian exuberance of creativity and creative destruction in artistic, intellectual or spiritual endeavour. Objectionable in Nietzsche is the further strengthening, exaltation and hegemony of the autonomous self,

# PROOF

Introduction 29

in his or her will to power. This is not only ethically objectionable but also counterproductive for the self, blocking the dynamics of the self in a transcendence of the self – which is what Nietzsche seeks. In brief: Nietzsche's endeavour of transcending the self from within is self-defeating (literally and figuratively).

For criticism of the centrality of the self I will then turn to Levinas, in Chapter 8. Levinas assumes that the human being's nature, his or her being, is the *conatus essendi*. Since ethics requires an orientation towards the other, according to Levinas we need something that goes beyond human nature, 'beyond being'. Here lies a vestige of God; a divine inspiration or a 'trace of God', 'inscribed in us', for benevolence, for altruism, for taking responsibility for the other. But especially in his later work (*Other than Being*) Levinas is too radical in his subjugation of the self to the other, and while I understand the source and the intention of this radicalism, I cannot accept it. For that I am too much of a Nietzschean. And I argue that it does not rhyme with Levinas's own argument. The self should not only accept opposition from the other, as a source of transcendence, but should also offer it to the other as his or her source of transcendence. It is not good for the other to surrender to him or her unconditionally. We should offer the other what we seek in him or her; receive from the other what we give to him or her, though not necessarily in any balance of give and take. I agree with Levinas that the other can never be fully absorbed by the self, or vice versa, and that asymmetry and cognitive distance remain. This is not a shortcoming but an indication of the unbounded value of the other, and is a source of awe and respect. We can never and should never claim to grasp the other fully.

In Chapter 9, I pose the question of how to find a way between the exaltation of the self and exaltation of the other – a way between Nietzsche and Levinas. Here the lines of analysis in the preceding chapters come together. The self needs the other to attain the highest level of freedom. What appears to be a limitation of freedom yields access to greater freedom. The self is fragmented and largely hidden to itself. To achieve identity it needs the other. In cognition the self needs the other to learn and to invent by interaction. For both consistency and change of meaning we need discourse with others. For freedom, cognition and language we need empathy, openness to and acceptance of influence from the other, which entails altruism. Thus I arrive at the thesis of otherhumanism, the claim that the self needs others for reasons of knowledge, language, transcendence of the self, freedom and ethics. In opposition to both Nietzsche and Levinas I argue that, next to an instinct for individual survival, the *conatus essendi*, evolution has also left us with a capacity for empathy and an instinct for altruism, such that it is a part of our nature as well and that we need not go 'beyond being' for it. My position can be summarized in the motto: being is becoming, becoming is interacting, and interacting is ethics. Is ethics primary philosophy, as Levinas maintained? According to my view, without ethics there is no

(meaningful) interaction and hence no (meaningful) language or cognition. Turning it the other way around, perhaps there can be ethics without (much) cognition, as in some instinctive altruism. So, in that sense ethics is indeed primary. Beyond general principles of otherhumanism I try to show 'how it works in reality', in society, and I discuss the key subject of trust and its foundations and limitations, and what happens when we go beyond the relation between self and other to include third and more persons. Here I build on my earlier work on trust (Nooteboom 2002).

Finally, in the last chapter, Chapter 10, I take a critical look at other-humanism. Can it work, is it viable, and what are its limits? Among other things, I present the evolutionary arguments for the viability of altruism, but also its limitations.

## 2 Which Avenues?

What basis is there for humanism in science and philosophy? If humanism rejects religion, what are the objections? What are my objections to the Enlightenment and the Romantic foundations of humanism? After all this criticism – what to do and how to proceed? How far can a naturalist approach take us? What remains of metaphysics?

### Which God?

The dilemma that pervades all forms of godservice – religion with a God – is that if God is to be what he is to be, the only thing we can say about him is that there is nothing we can say about him. All categories that we have, applying as they do to being in the world, to nature, humanity and culture, cannot apply to something that transcends it all. If we understood God that would mean that he was finite and imperfect. Even the very notion of him ‘being something’ that we might or might not ‘understand’, and our calling him ‘him’, are fundamentally problematic. This has been repeatedly recognized in all monotheistic religions, Jewish, Christian and Islamic; but such an ineffable God is not very helpful or satisfactory, leading people to speculate about Him anyway.

Up until the Reformation, around 1500, in the West the world was seen as containing both the sacred and the profane, with the church and a divinely appointed monarch to mediate between the two. The sacred is the locus of a providential God who has designs for humanity and intervenes in the world with miracles. In the Enlightenment this view was replaced by a view of the world as operating according to the design of God who stands outside of it and does not interfere. In each of the monotheistic world religions the notion of God appeared in different forms in different places and times. There are three basic forms (Armstrong 1993).

One set of views is that of the philosophers. The minimum notion is that of God as the ‘totality of nature’ (Spinoza). This is virtually equal to atheism (but it was unsafe to acknowledge that at the time). A step further is the

deist notion of God as an outside, supernatural force and the first, uncaused cause, the prime mover, the creator of natural and moral order in the world. The moral order entails that the human being has a striving, sanctioned by God, towards survival, which includes, indeed requires, a striving for interaction in a mutually beneficial and profitable exchange. This order is not given by revelation but can be read off from nature. This is based on the argument from design – that a mechanism must have a designer – which was endorsed by most mainstream Enlightenment philosophers but rejected by the radical stream.

Next is the notion that God did not simply create the laws of nature and then let the system run its course, but intervenes in the world. In particular, there is the dualistic notion of God providing the soul apart from the body, and providing movement, life, development and thought apart from matter (Newton, Locke). This enables immortality of the soul, and punishment and reward in a hereafter, considered by many to be indispensable for moral order. It allows for immaterial beings such as angels and demons. Many in the mainstream Enlightenment endorsed this view of God.

Next, but related, is the idea of revelation in the Bible or other holy book.

Finally, there is the notion of Christ as the Son of God, role model and redeemer, and the miracles associated with him and his disciples. This was still supported by some of the philosophers in the mainstream Enlightenment.

The alternative to divine creation and intervention is the theory of an evolutionary process producing forms of life, though at this time it had yet to be invented. There is an ancient hylozoic view that the potential to grow and develop is embodied in matter (attributed to the Greek philosopher Strato of Lampsacus 335–269 BC). Some of the naturalists in the second half of the eighteenth century were discovering natural phenomena that raised ideas that suggested evolution (such as the extinction of species, life in the sea preceding life on land, both in contradiction with the Bible), but a coherent and convincing evolutionary logic had to wait until Darwin (1809–82).

As the notion of God acquires more personal and human traits, such as will, design, intentions for the world and humanity, benevolence, anger, revenge, and punishment and reward, we approach the second God, the personal God of the people, who is like a father: just; stern yet benevolent; setting morality; dispensing justice, punishment and reward; promising a hereafter, solace and guidance; a being to whom one can pray, confess and make sacrifices.

The sparse, abstract, deistic notion of the God of some philosophers is in danger of becoming a God without religion, and of becoming morally vacuous. If God is indifferent to mankind, or is equivalent to nature; and mankind is made in the image of God, or is a part of nature; then it is natural for mankind to also be indifferent to others, and it is no surprise that he

# PROOF

*Which Avenues?* 33

can be a source of evil. This God remains far away from the experience of ordinary people. So, for institutional reasons, to bridge this gap, God has to be revamped in terms of the human categories of will, intention, knowledge, anger, benevolence, compassion, good and evil. We need anthropomorphisms and rituals for God to function as a symbol and source of consolation, guidance, morality, social justice, reward and punishment. Even Buddhism, which resists the notion of God, was forced to adopt worldly or semi-worldly forms of bodhisattvas, avatars, statues of Buddha and ritual.

The personalistic notion of God the Father cannot do without the notion of God the creator. Doubt concerning the argument from design received a powerful impulse from Kant's argument (in his *Critique of Pure Reason*) that that the argument from design is based on the notion of causality, with God as the first cause, and that notions of causality cannot be assumed for anything beyond the phenomena in our observation. That is why Kant's criticism of the notion of God as the prime cause ultimately was a death blow to godservice, though the 'death of God' took some hundred years to materialize. However, even Kant was forced to re-admit God for reasons not of causality but of morality.

The tragedy of this notion of God the Father is that if God is personal, and loves and hates or condemns, selectively, then so can we – or so we must, if we wish to follow God. While intended to elevate humanity god-service administers to our ingrained instincts of exclusion, persecution and fanaticism.

And there is the problem of evil in relation to the justice of God ('theodicy'): if God is all-knowing, all-powerful and benevolent, how can we account for the existence of evil in the world (see Chapter 4)? And if calamities and injustice are the will of God, this may be used to absolve ourselves from efforts to redress them. We may also be tempted to ignore the needs of our fellow beings in our attempts to access God. And there is the problem of predestination: who will be saved by God and who will not? Can one gain redemption by one's own actions? And, with Nietzsche and Heidegger, we may wonder that if God gives us solace from the fear of death whether this may eliminate the urge to live our lives fully.

There is also the God of the mystics: not a God 'out there', either as a person or as a metaphysical principle, or as a transcendent being beyond humanity and the world, but as a God to be found 'in here', in the soul of the individual self. There have been mystical streams in all three world religions, some in Christianity, but more developed and persistent in the Jewish Kabbalah and in Islamic Sufism (Armstrong 1993). Mystics accept that God is ineffable and reject rationalistic, explanatory, metaphysical accounts of God in favour of a mystical experience of Him deep within the self, in a personal, subjective experience of transcendence. Any symbolism used has no pretence of description or explanation. Sacred texts are not to be interpreted literally as an account of creation and a rulebook for

conduct, but as a metaphorical, artistic means to call forth and develop the experience of mystical union. The egotistic self obstructs the view of the inner mystery of things, but by proper exercise and an ascetic life we can surpass this obstruction and then no longer feel isolated but become one with the ground of everything that is. The egotistic ego has to be bypassed to dissolve the self in the highest ground of being, which is 'the One', both nothing and everything, 'the All'. This comes close to Buddhism. In philosophy we find it in Schopenhauer. Some have argued that in its denial of a God existing outside nature and with the notion that 'the One' is 'the All', Kabbalism and Sufism resemble Spinozistic philosophy (Israel 2008).

I sympathize with mysticism, but there are two problems with it. First, it can go awry in regard to subjectivist delusions and a neglect of reason. The church father Saint Augustine (354–430) was tempted by mysticism but feared he might drown in its stream and concluded that we need the institution of the church to gain some outside foothold and structure. And indeed, present psychology, social psychology and brain science show how unreliable introspection, the delving into the self, can be.

A second though related problem is that people become vulnerable to mystification, manipulation and the arbitrary exercise of power by self-proclaimed prophets and leaders of sects and cults. Mysticism carries the temptation of *gnosis*: a claim to the personal, privileged revelation of a unique, esoteric insight into the true and the good that is offered to a community of the faithful and imposed with force if necessary to lead them to salvation. Having freed ourselves from clerical authority we don't want to fall into the claws of raving madmen. In Buddhism transcendence required dedication and disciplined training, guided by masters, and only a few could achieve full transcendence. Appeals to subjective, personal religious experience can be manipulated to yield the hysteria, prejudice, fanaticism, self-indulgence and violence of such sects as the Ranters, born-again Christians and evangelicals. The classic historical example is the religious terror of the Anabaptists in the city of Münster around 1530.

All the problems I have mentioned have of course been recognized in the history of religion. Attempts were made again and again, over millennia, to reconcile the irreconcilable: the objectively existing, transcendent God, abstract or personal, with the immanent God of subjective, personal experience – all without lasting success. The history of religion is more a cycling of emphasis between conceptions of God, and struggles between them, than a unification of them.

### **Beyond godservice**

Horrified we watch Islamic extremism, forgetting the Christian suppression and extremism that developed from the symbiosis of church and state that emerged in France in the sixth century and was institutionalized under

Charlemagne. That symbiosis arose from political opportunism. It was needed by the pope to survive military pressure from the Longobards in Italy and by the emerging Frankish state for the sanction of the pope to establish an overarching authority of the king over rival clans and fiefs. That symbiosis led to a straightjacket of dogmatism and an extremely violent suppression of other peoples and tribes in Europe, such as the Saxons who were asked to choose between death and Christianization. Worldly and spiritual power conspired in a feudal system of exploitation and suppression. This stands in sharp contrast to contemporaneous Moorish rule in 'El Andalus' in Spain, with its tolerance of other faiths than the Islam and a market economy (Levering Lewis 2008). Later, the alliance of church and state led to crusades, including those against the Cathars in the south of France.

We also tend to forget other horrors associated with Christian godservice, such as the bloody Thirty Years War in the seventeenth century between Catholics and Protestants and their factions. Some early Enlightenment philosophers lived during that war.

However, the fact that godservice has produced such horrendous suppression and violence does not prove that it does not also have beneficial features and could not be reformed to further the beneficial and reduce the horrendous. It satisfies a craving for solace and an escape from the fear of death and the vulnerability of human existence to contingencies that are beyond the grasp and control of humanity. Levinas argued that the human being is atheist by nature and receives notions of God from outside his nature. I argue, to the contrary, that a human being has a deeply rooted craving for God that follows from self-consciousness. The human being is aware of death, and this yields an unreasoned, primordial, existential anguish. That anguish, fear of death, and the perceived arbitrariness and senselessness of much suffering, in disasters of nature and inhumanity, seek a way out – through our creation of God and an afterlife, as Feuerbach argued, in what Levinas called a 'need-religion' and a 'redemption-egotism' (Guwy 2008, p. 114). Religion more generally offers a consolation for the anguish of existence and fear of death. Above all it yields a perspective for the human being to transcend itself by giving the self a meaning that defeats death. Religion can give meaning, in the sense of giving life a higher purpose, and it can cause feelings of transcendence (Joas 2007). That transcendence, with feelings of awe, helps us to look and feel beyond the self. Probably, many Islamic suicide bombers are seeking transcendence (Neiman 2009). Godservice can be a source of inspiration for compassion with the other human being, as an opposing force to egotism. If we are all the creation of God then we must love each other as part of that creation. However, 'the other' is an abstraction, and in such abstraction compassion loses its force. The force of Jesus is, I think, that he personifies and embodies the abstract other.

However, godservice is not the only possible source of such feelings of transcendence. Political ideology can also serve such a purpose. Under

Nazism and Stalinism executioners and planners of human destruction were dedicated to a 'higher cause'.

Transcendence is literally rising above, and rising above the self requires something outside oneself that one esteems more highly and to which one surrenders oneself. The human being feels an urge to seek the transcendent outside the world in something absolute, universal, eternal and supernatural, which is not subject to the vicissitudes of earthly life and lends a feeling of escape from human mortality and fragility. This Platonic dream is the source, I believe, of the horrors produced by godservice and ideology. There is a disastrous combination of the thirst for transcendence, in godservice or ideology, with an instinctive inclination, inherited from evolution, to mistrust people outside one's own group. When access is claimed to the transcendent in the form of the absolute, universal and transcendent good, this yields the claim to a privileged role and the task of realizing it in the world. Whoever thinks differently is outside the good, and hence evil and deserving of suppression or elimination. Mixed with an instinct for a mistrust of outsiders, this yields radical violence.

Religious fanatics and populist leaders can harness such instincts to breed prejudice, discrimination and persecution as a transcendent duty. Prejudice and mistrust escalate into condemnation of heresy and 'infidels' and become an issue that transcends life and the fear of death, often accompanied by suicidal fanaticism and violence. For religion this applies in particular if it is monotheistic. With multiple gods, yet another god is more readily accepted.

For Levinas the other human being can be the higher, the transcendent. In fact, we only have each other to fall back on, as the best we have, and godservice only distracts from that condition. With this latter, we bypass the other in order to reach an unattainable God. This was one reason for Levinas to reject godservice. Cannot the other be sufficient as a source of transcendence, without any God?

Next to fanaticism and extremism in the name of the higher than human, religion has also led to complacency, hypocrisy, a denial of the forces of life, fear mongering, suppression, and the accusation and persecution of heresy – as Nietzsche has forcefully argued. Especially in his *Towards the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche gaily hammered away at the Christian morality of sin, guilt, penance, charity, pity and self-sacrifice. Charity furthers humanity in one sense but self-denial is a crime against humanity in another sense. A morality for the weak weakens humanity. Christian morality suppresses the human being in its creative destruction, in art, entrepreneurship, science and philosophy. The morality of self-sacrifice is sold as charity but was and still is employed for the degradation and suppression of citizens by spiritual, intellectual and political elites building cathedrals of authority, with the illusion and false hope of a hereafter as a carrot and a stick. According to Nietzsche altruism only multiplies sorrow, since it requires that people

# PROOF

*Which Avenues?* 37

make themselves miserable in their commiseration with others. It blocks the vitality of life and expression, with its self-imposed limitations, for the benefit of others. Furthermore, charity is often no more than a hypocritical savouring of the misery of others, an excuse for pusillanimity or a mask for a lack of courage and initiative, or an attempt to feel superior to others and belittle one's own sorrow.

The problem is that so often Nietzsche seems to have a point while one feels in one's gut that he cannot or may not really be fully right. We feel an ethical revulsion to his view. We see, after all, to what a rejection of morality leads. One of the points of the present book is to show that Nietzsche makes a crucial error of thought.

I will not enter a debate as to whether existing religions may overcome the problems indicated above and adapt to modern times without thereby losing their core. That is, I think, Taylor's agenda – and I am fascinated by it. In Christianity such adaptation has in large measure taken place: in individualization of belief and resistance to an authoritarian church; in an acceptance of the separation of church and state; and in a resistance from within to moralistic suppression and fundamentalism. The question is: what along this path will remain of the notion of God and of ideas such as a hereafter and redemption? And what then with such loss will remain distinctive from other non-theistic forms of transcendence?

I can summarize my view on religion and God as follows. It is reasonable to give the name 'God' to the ultimate cause of the world. But this entails that what he transcends our understanding to such an extent that we can say nothing sensible about him except this: that we can say nothing sensible about him. The very notion of causality is dubious in this context (as Kant argued). We can feel awe for him and see him as a reason for modesty, but we can have these also in regard to the totality of nature without calling that God. The claim of privileged knowledge of God on the basis of a revelation has been a source of consolation but also of much evil and suffering. The claim of being elect in revelation can be a grab for power or an excuse for discrimination. Belief in an afterlife and in divine providence as a sop for the anguish of death and of the fragility and distress of human existence is not only cognitively but also ethically dubious. It distracts attention from the need to make the best of the only life we have, with what we have, to realize ourselves in that and to take responsibility for the only hereafter there is – of what we leave behind in nature and society. The good in life consists in doing that with courage, reflection, faithfulness and benevolence. Religion fits in all this as a feeling of being bound to something that transcends the self, which is not necessarily a god. That can be another human being, a multiple of them or the totality of nature and culture.

Some of the values that I pursue, of justice, tolerance, empathy, attention to the other human being and to what we leave behind after our life, strongly resemble Christian values, and are of course rooted in the society in

which I grew up; but they no longer need to be Christian. They can become of age, tapping from other sources than the Bible, and can be stronger, without the perversities of godservice.

### Beyond the Enlightenment

As a stream of thought and worldviews the Enlightenment is variegated. In my analysis I gratefully employ the monumental inventory by Israel (2008). He maintains that it is useful to distinguish two streams: a radical stream and a moderate mainstream. The differences are summarized schematically in the table below. Each of the philosophers involved has his own configuration of views and in that sense is unique. Consequently there are important deviations within the two streams, to the point that one can question the sense of forcing them into such a simplified binary scheme. Israel claims that it is justified to maintain the distinction between the radical and the mainstream, in order to achieve focus and to distinguish the main issues – and I make allowance for that view. A prime, fundamental issue is whether (the radicals) or not (the moderates) there is a unity of movement and matter, with a self-generation of life forms from matter, without an outside creator-God, and consequently mortality of the soul, without a hereafter. The most influential sources were Spinoza in the radical stream and Locke and Newton in the moderate stream. However, I will indicate, as Israel does in much more detail, some of the important deviations within the two streams.

#### The radical and mainstream Enlightenment

Radical	Mainstream
Spinoza (1632–77), Bayle (1647–1706), Diderot (1713–84), d’Alembert (1717–83), Helvétius (1715–71), d’Holbach (1723–89)	Descartes (1596–1650), Leibniz (1646–1716), Malebranche (1638–1715), Locke (1632–1704), Newton (1642–1727), Condorcet (1743–94), Voltaire (1694–1778), Montesquieu (1689–1755), Hume (1711–76)
Monism: unity of body and soul, movement and matter	Dualism of body and soul; movement, development and faculty of thought given from outside
Mortality of the soul	Immortality of the soul; punishment and redemption in a hereafter
Atheism, God as totality of nature; no supernatural agency (God, angels, devils); nature self-generating	God as creator, providential, intervening in the world
Christ not divine	Christ as Son of God
No miracles	Some miracles (e.g. those of Christ)

*(continued)*

(Continued)

Radical	Mainstream
Determinism	Free will
Rift between reason/philosophy and religion/theology	Consistency; complementarity between reason and faith
Reason, no revelation	Reason and revelation combined
Morality from drive to live and survive	Morality ordained by God
Society driven by philosophy, ideas	Society based on institutions, social dynamics
Equality in society	Equality in state of nature; hierarchy in society
Democracy	Constitutional monarchy; aristocracy

The radical stream originated in the Netherlands, with Spinoza and his followers, had some influence in Britain but never dominated there, moved to France where it was at first in the ascendance, was subsequently dominated by the moderate stream adopted from Britain, but eventually won out again and in the long run had the greater impact on modernity.

The ideas of Spinoza were far from unprecedented in the history of ideas, as argued for example by Bayle (Israel 2008). The unity of mind and matter, body and soul, God and the world; the mortality of the individual soul; there being no providential God and no divinely ordained morality – all had been proposed before, in a variety of forms, by the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers (Xenophanes, Strato), the Stoics (Zeno of Citium), the Epicureans and Averroes (in the twelfth-century Islamic Enlightenment). In the second half of the eighteenth century there was a lively debate on whether Confucianism was also Spinozistic. The Kabbalah and Sufism have been compared to Spinozism on the grounds of their monism of God and the world, of the One being the All.

Being an atheist by way of denying God in any sense, even as the prime mover or as the totality of nature, for a long time was unsayable. One was already branded an atheist if one denied any supernatural agency to a providential God; or His intervention in the world; or His being a source of morality, of revelation, of providing immortality to the soul and punishment and reward in a hereafter; or redemption by Christ; or the miracles of Christ. To renounce that, as the radicals did, was seen by the mainstream to lead to a total collapse of any order in society. Therefore the legacy of Spinoza was fought furiously.

The Enlightenment did not directly yield a full renunciation of God, especially in the mainstream, but the notion of God changed. For Malebranche and Leibniz God is like a rational person, designing the world according to reasons and possibilities that are objective and independent of

his will (Nadler 2008). His will is constrained and guided by His wisdom and reason. According to Malebranche this yields imperfections that God does not want, but he cannot or will not continually interrupt the laws he has put in place with miracles to redress every case of injustice. That would mess up the natural order as a basis for rational enterprise. Here lies a shortcoming of God. For others that is unthinkable and contradictory to the essence of God. According to Leibniz even apparent evil and injustice contribute to the perfection of creation, even if that is not apparent to us human beings. The comparison is made with dissonants in music that contribute to the harmony of the whole. The actual world is the best of all possible worlds: other possible worlds would be worse.

For Descartes, by contrast, God is not like a person. He is beyond our reason and understanding. He does not will or design or decide on the basis of reasons and objective truths beyond his power. God does not will things because they are good; they are good because he wills them. God has shaped even logical truths, and he could have made 1 plus 1 equal to 4. His will is unbounded in any way.

Couldn't one say that a Cartesian God who does not will on the basis of goals and reason is in fact not endowed with will and reason at all (Nadler 2008, p. 279)? Such a position leads to the view of Spinoza, who radicalized the idea from Descartes. According to Spinoza any view of God that is an analogy to man is an absurd anthropomorphism. Our notions of goodness, justice, goals, reason, intentions do not apply to God. With Spinoza, God stood for the world as a rationally coherent causal system, with no divine aim, intention or intervention. For Spinoza God is nothing other than nature and its laws. God as nature just is. To Spinoza Christ was not divine, offers no redemption and was no more than a uniquely inspired person who set an example to humanity.

Both Descartes and Leibniz believed in an immortal soul. According to Spinoza's view, in a denial of Cartesian duality of body and soul, the soul is rooted in the body and dies with it. Spinoza was punished for his heresies in Amsterdam by being banished from the synagogue and the community; other Jews were prohibited from taking note of his ideas and associating with him (Nadler 2001). Some of his followers in Holland received harsh prison sentences (Israel 2008).

For Newton God not only designed and created the world but intervenes in nature, e.g. to keep the planets in orbit, and he maintains the separation between matter and motion. For Locke, thinking is the operation on sense impressions of innate, immaterial mental capabilities given by God. For both Newton and Locke there remains an immortal soul, punishment and reward in a hereafter, miracles and a God-ordained morality. Voltaire maintained that morality is ordained by God but saw it as implanted in the human being in the form of an instinct rather than given by revelation.

# PROOF

*Which Avenues?* 41

The table suggests a unity within the two streams that is not in fact there. In particular, there is a divide between philosophical rationalism (e.g. Descartes) and empiricism (Locke, Hume). However, Locke's assumption of innate, immaterial forms of thought that operate on sense impressions to produce ideas is not radically different from Cartesian innate ideas. Spinoza and Locke were close in their view that ideas arise out of sensibility and experience, having no independent existence (Israel 2008, p. 549), so that there is a correspondence between ideas and things (*ibid.*, p. 527).

Hobbes (1588–1679) and Spinoza were in agreement concerning the unity of body and soul, in their denial of the usual notions of God, in the absence of free will and in their profession of the supremacy of reason over religion. But they disagreed over the issue of complete freedom of expression. Hobbes allowed a sovereign much more leeway to suppress freedom of expression for reasons of state. That is why I don't know where to put Hobbes in the table. Bayle was not as egalitarian as Spinoza and on that point was closer to Hobbes. However, Bayle is counted as a radical Enlightenment philosopher and has had enormous influence in propagating Spinozistic ideas.

Many extolled mathematics as the paragon of reason (Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza) – but not all did. Bayle and Diderot, for example, were sceptical on this.

Hume agreed with the radicals in his rejection of a providential God, immortality of the soul, punishment and reward in a hereafter, God-ordained morality, miracles and freedom of the will. In view of this there are arguments for seeing him as a radical. However, he was ambivalent about a creator-God from the argument of design; saw severe limitations to the scope of reason and human understanding; recognized the indispensability of institutions, a moral function for religion, and the unforeseeable and unintended effects of social interaction; and accepted the inevitability of social and political inequality and hierarchy. So, on the political side he definitely belonged to the moderate mainstream. While he sided with the radicals in his acceptance of enlightened self-interest, including regard for the interests of others and for the common good as the basis for morality, in contrast with the radicals he thought that the human being also has an instinct for moral sentiments, following earlier ideas on this by Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and Hutcheson (1694–1746). This is of particular importance for the present book. I will argue in several places that next to an instinct for self-preservation and self-realization the human being also has an instinct for social legitimacy and (bounded) altruism.

On the moral side, radical thinking hinged on the rationality of equity. As simply, clearly and rigorously as the whole being is more than its parts, it is rational to pursue not only self-interest but also the interest of others and the common good, and to adhere to the basic principle, going back to Hobbes, that one 'should not do unto others what one would not want to have done to oneself'. This neglects conflicts between self-interest and

the common good. De La Mettrie (1709–51) recognized and radicalized this insight and maintained that, arguing from the nature of humanity, ethics reduces to individual pleasure seeking without any inhibitions from conscience. Regard for others is imposed by laws but is arbitrary and has no grounding in the nature of humanity. In this book, in Chapter 4, I argue that while in many cases enlightened self-interest is consistent with taking interests of others into account, that is not always the case. There are problems of free riding, the *problem of the commons*, and the prisoner's dilemma that locks people into collectively damaging actions. I will give examples later. However, I also argue, against the radicals, that next to self-interest human nature also has an instinct towards altruism, within bounds.

On the political side, for the radical stream human conduct and society are to be guided by reason and philosophy, while the mainstream has an eye for limits to reason; the role of gifted individuals; institutional effects; the role of social habits and norms; unintended consequences of social dynamics (Hume); a variety of societies according to climate, location, environment and religion (Montesquieu); and technology and entrepreneurship (the economist Turgot). It is not so much error that hampers truth and government as extant habits, routines, indolence, vested interests and resistance to change. Some radicals (such as Bayle) were sympathetic to the argument that rational philosophy was beyond the grasp of the common people, but they argued that it can serve to direct lawmakers. This, however, entails a breach of the principle of universal equality with a hierarchy directed by a law-making elite.

Kant was a rationalist in his ethics. Ethical principles are universal, impersonal and objective and apply to everyone, regardless of the consequences. With his categorical imperative, moral principles apply of which one rationally desires that they apply to everyone.

Rousseau stood with one leg in the Enlightenment – in the rationality of the social contract, resistance to the authority of the church and the importance of education towards independent thought – and one leg in Romanticism – in his recognition of the need for emotion, primacy of feeling over reason, introspection and the inner nature of man as the source of the good, and his writings that were an inspiration for the Romantic literature of '*Sturm und Drang*'. However, he also developed the idea of the 'general will' of a collective individual, the state, with a civil religion to bind people to a social contract.

In spite of the variety of thought within the Enlightenment there are a number of common features. The different streams had basic values in common that formed the basis of 'modernity': a striving for tolerance, individuality, personal freedom, freedom of expression, legality and racial and sexual equality. However, this does not apply as fully to some as it does for others. Hobbes, Locke, Voltaire, Hume and Montesquieu were not democrats, accepting social hierarchies and not extending full tolerance to all

(e.g. excluding Jews, blacks or women). The Enlightenment as a whole aimed to free humanity from the excesses of superstition, irrationality, arbitrariness, prejudice, backwardness and suppression by religious and worldly authority, and from hierarchy on the basis of birth, throwing humanity back onto its own insights and responsibility. The great significance of Descartes was that in his radical doubt he called for the questioning of authority and dogma, and appealed to one's own thinking as the only justifiable basis for judgement. The Enlightenment sobered up thinking and disenchanting people away from pure speculation. The radical Enlightenment was also idealistic and believed in the possibility of improving humanity and society.

My position in all this is as follows. Emotionally and aesthetically my sympathy lies with the radical stream. I admire the daring, the intellectual coherence, the liberation and the idealism of it. I feel the appeal of mathematical starkness, which itself pulled me into the study of mathematics. I am thrilled by Spinoza's philosophical analysis *more geometrico* (in geometrical fashion). I feel the pull of Plato, tempted by the absolute and universal. However, I have come to see more wisdom in an Aristotelian line of thought. Speaking in terms provided by Pascal, I feel the appeal of the *esprit de geometrie* but I also see the need for *esprit de finesse*.

I think the ideals of reason and universal freedom of expression and equality under the law are still worth striving for. However, I think history has clearly shown how unrealistic the dream of reason is and how perverse dreams of universality can become. I agree with Hume and Montesquieu that institutions and other conditions differentiate societies and that social interaction has unpredictable and unintended outcomes. On the positive side, I agree with Hume (and Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Adam Smith) that people do have inborn 'moral sentiments' that help to curb perversities of self-interest. I discuss the latter in Chapter 4.

### Rationalism

One point of criticism of the Enlightenment is that it is hyper-rationalistic, neglects the negative role of the emotions and feelings and overestimates reason as capable of delivering indubitable knowledge. Neiman (2009) claims that this criticism is incorrect. And indeed some philosophers in the moderate mainstream saw limits to reason, in particular Hume, who was of the opinion that reason cannot fully fathom the mysteries of nature and that in moral judgement 'reason is the slave of the passions [feelings]'. Descartes recognized the importance of feelings as a motor of conduct, but he held that they are often in conflict with reason and must be and can be subdued by it. However, the radical stream (Spinoza, Bayle, Diderot and other French materialists) extolled reason as the source of morality rather than divine revelation, and they saw unconscious mental processes, feelings and emotions as supporting rather than disrupting reason (Israel 2008, p. 694).

According to the radicals reason cannot serve to underpin godservice, and godservice cannot be founded on reason, as Bayle, in particular, propounded. There can be little doubt that the radical stream saw rational analysis of causes and connections as the source of insight in both nature and society. In the mainstream, while reason was used to condemn superstition and to enhance individual freedom, it maintained an 'irreducible residue of the miraculous' (ibid., p. 126) in Christ's divinity, in resurrection, original sin, redemption and divine providence.

The moderate view became mainstream because it denied a rift between reason and faith, and maintained the rift between body and soul so that one could go along with the Enlightenment without surrendering faith. As mainstream, it made the acceptance and profession of reason and naturalist tendencies respectable and widespread. In summary, despite deep differences between streams of Enlightenment, overall there was a striving for force of reason rather than force of political or ecclesiastical power, for reasons of wishing to resist superstition and miracles, and to promote individual freedom and rigour of thought and argument.

Neiman (2009, p. 187) proposes that Enlightenment reason should be interpreted not as a pretension of unlimited rationality or the ability to achieve ultimate truth but as the ongoing asking of questions without rest until there are acceptable answers with satisfactory proofs – and which are not 'proofs' of authority or tradition. This is reminiscent of Socrates and a definition of reason that I gladly adopt. When reason weakens, being reasonable becomes all the more important. The question remains: what questions and answers are acceptable and why?

While in the moderate Enlightenment there was already insight into the problems and contradictions of reason, in the popular and influential version of Enlightenment thought, derived from the radical stream, reason ruled as a panacea (Safranski 1997), and it is worthwhile looking at the counter-arguments.

Rationalism has several meanings. One meaning, of epistemic rationalism, is the idea that knowledge arises from innate ideas, either directly present or present in a potential to emerge, as opposed to the empiricist idea that knowledge comes from outside, in sense impressions. This is the assumption of some 'rationalist' Enlightenment philosophers (such as Descartes) but not of other empiricist Enlightenment philosophers (such as Locke and, to some extent, Hume). I will not discuss this here.

A second meaning, of methodological rationalism, or rationality, is the idea of impersonal, not emotionally driven, rigorous argument from indubitable, objectively given, clear principles or ideas. Mathematics stands for its ideal. It is opposed to subjectivity; emotionality; loose, vague ideas or arguments; non-logical reasoning; and assumptions or actions unsupported by argument.

Horkheimer and Adorno's (2010, p. 88) criticism of the Enlightenment concerns its ideal of rationality as that of a unified logical or mathematical system

# PROOF

*Which Avenues?* 45

where particular truths are derived from general first principles, whether these are innate ideas, arbitrary axioms or the highest-level abstractions from observations. Thought that is not directed at such systematicity of coherence and implication is seen as either without direction and arbitrary or authoritarian. Horkheimer and Adorno proceed to argue that this thinking is totalitarian and suppressive in its subsumption of the particular under the general, where 'the particular is seen only as an instance of the general and the general only as that part of the particular with which it lets itself be grasped and maintained' (ibid., p. 92). I agree with this ethical suspicion of universals. Epistemologically my objection is that this view of a unified logical-mathematical system is static, assuming fixed categories that do not allow for innovation, discovery and creation. There, particulars escape and break up universals in the constitution of new ones. How this may happen is discussed in Chapter 6.

Instrumental rationality, as used in economics, refers to having goals and making the most efficient and effective choice of means to achieve them. That requires that the goals are known and are stable relative to their realization, and that the means are given. Economists assume, or they argue as if, that in 'economic behaviour' (whatever that is) people are rational in that sense. Here also my objection concerns the absence of discovery and innovation, of new goals, means and meanings.

In fact, goals often become clear or emerge only while people strive for them, and then they may shift; the means and their efficacy to achieve goals are often ill known in advance. As present neural science and social psychology have shown, more than 90 per cent of our thinking is unconscious; actions derive to a large extent from unreasoned impulse; reasons for actions are often rationalizations after the act; reason works on the basis of mental frames that are triggered by context and are driven and moulded by emotions; and conduct is not only driven by self-interest but also by desire for relations with others and an appreciation by others.

The fact that this is the nature of our cognition gives no reason for joy. I fear a society that develops into more emotion and less reason, more opinion and less fact, more proclamation and less argument, more impulse and less patience, more drama and less reflection. In time, that cannot but go wrong. It creates too large a temptation for talented populists to manipulate it for their pet ideologies, delusions or political ambitions. The danger is large that it will lead to renewed outcasting, suppression, persecution, murder and war. Thus, normatively, as something to strive for, I would plead for Enlightenment ideals of rationality, but, descriptively, as a matter of fact, I think we are not very capable of it and we have needs, instincts and limitations that stand in its way. Individual cognition is indeed supported by unconscious thought, feelings and emotions, as Spinoza claimed, but these also require reason to curtail destructive impulsiveness. I discuss the relation between conscious deliberation and unconscious impulses in Chapter 4, in the discussion of free will. I discuss cognition in more detail in Chapter 5.

Cartesian reliance on the disconnected individual's thought does not work. We cannot doubt everything, we think and act on the basis of tacit assumptions and unconscious conceptualizations, and we can only try to adjust them or transform them on the basis of problems that we encounter and try to solve in the practice of our action. That is an insight from American pragmatism as a philosophical stream of thought since C. S. Peirce (1839–1914), but the idea goes back to David Hume and we also find it in Nietzsche and Heidegger. I would add that we should take into account the limitations of rationality and knowledge, ill understood human nature, the roots of cognition in the body, the lack of transparency of the self to the self, the unconscious in our cognition, the roots of thinking and feeling in social ties, mystical feelings and an urge to transcend human death and frailty. If we limit ourselves to what is available to the conscious while in fact the unconscious largely forms the basis for the human subject, then we would be unable to criticize the subject (Bernasconi 2002, p. 236). At least some people in the Enlightenment overestimated the mind and neglected the body. The original edition of Descartes's *Meditations* had the subtitle 'in which is demonstrated the existence of God and the immortality of the soul'. Cartesian separation of body and soul, needed to maintain the immortality of the soul and the purity of the soul from the stains of the body, led to a neglect of body and nature. Spinoza, by contrast, recognized the interweaving of body and mind, but he overestimated the force of reason in understanding the world and guiding behaviour.

But is there, then, no longer a soul, as something that is characteristic of humans, that all humans have? What else forms the basis for universal human dignity and justice (Joas 2007)? If, now, we see the soul, as suggested earlier, as the capability or gift of transcendence, is then justice to be seen as the enabling of that? Then benevolence and altruism would be conditions for justice.

I object to contractarian views of justice, in a tradition running, with variations and differences, from Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke and Kant to Rawls, which see justice as based on a contract of mutual benefit between rational, free, independent agents who are roughly equal in power and resources. I reject all the assumptions of rationality, independence, freedom, equality and mutual benefit. What I find particularly objectionable is that, as argued by Nussbaum (2006), beings (including children, the disabled, the aged and animals) who are unfit, for reasons of limited resources or endowments, to offer their part in a deal of mutual benefit, or are in a position of limited power, are simply to be ignored and excluded. I prefer Hume's view of arrangements of society as conventions that evolve from practices that derive, in trial and error, from a recognition of common interest. He used the metaphor that 'two men who pull the oars of a boat do it by agreement or convention, though they have never given promises to each other'. People are not independent agents but, especially in complex, modern societies, are ensnared in collective processes and logics, such as market mechanisms,

that they cannot individually control and that to a large extent determine their options for choice.

### Collective irrationality

Society is even less rational than the individual. Here, rationality is limited by a misalignment of incentives, in conflicts between individual and collective interests, and by the unpredictability of future options for choice and possible outcomes, as a result of unforeseeable interactions with existing and new players. In terms of game theory, in a given setting of game strategies and payoffs there is uncertainty as to which strategy an opponent will choose. A more fundamental uncertainty arises when the sets of players, strategies and pay-offs is open, with new ones arising as a function of strategies chosen. In other words, strategies and pay-offs may not be given prior to choice but emerge as a result of choice.

Politicians, managers, workers, consumers, even scientists, as guardians of reason, are dragged along in institutional processes that are rife with unwilling or unintended consequences. Often this takes the form of collective prisoner's dilemmas. Individually we would often like to step out of the process (of environmental degradation, wasteful consumption, neglect of human misery, political lobbying by private interests, greed and irresponsible conduct of bankers, sending troops to Afghanistan) but we cannot afford to do so unless others do as well – and so nobody does.

Bankers say they would like to take fewer financial risks and to extend lower bonuses to their workers, but they cannot afford to since they are driven to bad behaviour by the logic of financial markets and labour markets. The answer would be government intervention, to curtail risk taking and excessive bonuses, but no single government can afford to do that on its own since it would jeopardize the position and hence presence of banks in their country (and a global agreement on intervention is not in sight). We are stupefied by the egotistic, irresponsible behaviour of bankers but, despite widespread public indignation, no change of their conduct appears to be in sight. The horrible thing is that when they say that their conduct is merely symptomatic of how society as a whole behaves they have a point. It is not just bankers who behave like this: they are merely in a better position than most to hold society hostage to their greed.

From the responsibilities attached to the functions we fulfil, in professions, organizations or interest groups, we feel obliged to secure institutional interests we do not personally agree with. In their striving for influence and prestige, propelled by private career ambitions and the interests of civil servants, ministers vie for budgets while financial restraint or decentralization of initiative would be better for society. Thus, in innovation policy ministries of economics and of science vie for the biggest budgets for planning projects that in fact limit rather than promote innovation.

For innovation an evolutionary perspective is better than one of 'intelligent design'. Yet Science Foundations and Academies of Science play the game of central design because it enhances their positions as important players in the planning of innovation projects and budgets for funds which it is their task to distribute. Substantive arguments against this policy go against institutional interests and are ignored, and debate on them is dodged even in scientific communities, or especially there because they could not afford to ignore rational argument if that were given attention. Rational arguments and facts are ignored or set aside to preserve the status quo of existing inter-related interests and supporting rationalizations. There is a kind of 'omerta', a tacit obligation not to broach this issue, on pain of ostracism.

President Obama could not avoid sending more troops to Afghanistan because he had to commit himself to it in order to be elected, because Americans cannot afford to be seen to lose. European countries have to follow since they cannot afford not to go along with the US. Meanwhile every insider knows one cannot possibly win against terrorists who flee into vast inaccessible spaces, use civilians as shields, elicit the killing of civilians by occupation forces that will generate hatred and new recruits for terrorism, reward popular support with the growth and trade of opium, and provide reasons for suicidal actions to idealistic young people seeking transcendence from the banalities of the consumer society or seeking a heaven that supplies maidens to the martyrs. The efforts aimed at eliminating terrorism led to its increase. Local political leaders can shift the burden of fighting terrorists to the occupying forces, avoid the pressure to take their own responsibility and even exploit the hatred generated towards the occupying forces. It is a mess and not only in retrospect: one could see it coming, and many did. In summary, there are many examples where it is not rationality that dictates policy but a political logic of interlocking interests and positions.

### Universalism

A second problem of, especially, the radical Enlightenment lies in its excessive claims of universality, including universal notions of the good, the human, the individual, rationality, autonomy, freedom, equality, legality, self-determination, human dignity and the market, as if those notions should mean the same thing for everyone and always. This is related to the Platonic dream and the ideal of mathematical reasoning: like a correct proposition in geometry, laws and ideals also should apply equally to everyone, everywhere and always (Israel 2008, p. 292). Here also, the moderate mainstream Enlightenment was variegated. Montesquieu, for example, did allow for different political systems depending on contingencies of climate, environment, culture and religion.

The Enlightenment, and the early humanism of the Renaissance, revived classical Greek and Roman sources. Some of these supported the atheism

# PROOF

*Which Avenues?* 49

and materialism of the radical Enlightenment. They also gave an impulse, with ideas that go back to Plato, to a striving for knowledge, seen as the contemplation of eternal, universal, immutable principles, in both the radical and (some of) the moderate stream. This is evident, among others, in Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz and Spinoza, and in the ethics of Kant.

One problem is that abstraction and generalization make individuality subordinate to universality. This emerges in the God of Malebranche and Leibniz, who preferred not to break the natural laws with miracles for the sake of individual justice. The Enlightenment offered individualism without individuality. It provided a platform for the soaring of science, but it also provided a temptation for ideologies that transcend individual people in their specific circumstances, to which individuals are sacrificed. Like religious belief it can yield extremism and violence in the name of the higher good, beyond the individual human being: 'universalism is imperialism' (Todorov 1989, p. 510).

An associated, exacerbating problem is that a universalistic notion of the good defines people who do not share it as not just mistaken but as outside the good and hence evil. If the universal good is also seen as otherworldly and pure, then the evil outside must be eradicated to maintain that purity. This applies to fundamentalist theistic religion as well as fundamentalist political ideology, including fundamentalist, Enlightenment inspired humanism.

The ideal of the abstract universal as an apotheosis of reason achieved its pinnacle in the German idealism of the nineteenth century (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel). Kierkegaard (1813–55) resisted this intensely. He saw it as a source of estrangement and dehumanization and pleaded for the lived experience of the individual, the personal: of an individual who can choose, not on the basis of reason but on the basis of will, with a subjective certainty based in a faith and belief in a personal God, and who can commit to it. The idea that life dominates knowledge and is a matter of the individual, not of any universal, resonates in the thought of Nietzsche, though with him it went together not with a surrender to God but with His denial. Kierkegaard inspired a certain stream of religious experience in Protestantism (Karl Barth) and the development of existentialism that was not religious (e.g. in Heidegger, Nietzsche, de Beauvoir and Sartre).

The oddness of individualism giving birth to universalism and totalitarianism is sharply illustrated in neo-liberal market ideology. That ideology sanctifies the heroic individual pursuing his or her self-interest and personal riches, in *laissez-faire*, in an abstract notion of markets that ignores variety according to local or national conditions of culture, institutions, history, community, education, infrastructure, science and technology, family, ethnic groups, clans, etc.

Paradoxically, the widening of the ambit of markets to what used to be public services, such as transport, health care and education, has led to an

increasingly complex system of controls designed or improvised ad hoc to enable markets to operate, to repair their imperfections and to redress unforeseen adverse outcomes. And these increasingly complex controls are themselves understood in universalistic terms.

In everyday modern life we are confronted with an administrative drive to abstraction and the rule of universals, and the universality of rules, in an increasing management and control that currently plague professional work. It is revealing that in statistics and econometrics the deviation from the average or the 'explained' outcome is called a 'disturbance term'. The individual, as a deviant, disturbs the order of the universal. Taylor (2011, p. 353) speaks of 'code fetishism': 'the entire spiritual dimension of human life is captured in a moral code'. I think we see that more widely in administrative behaviour. I attribute this to the Platonic dream of universality.

From a sense of responsibility and accountability towards shareholders in firms and towards citizens in public administration, managers in industry and government impose more and more controls. Yet we have known for a long time, in the management literature on 'communities of practice', that professional practice is too rich, diverse and variable, from one context (patient, pupil, motorcycle to be repaired, bridge to be built, conflict to be resolved, etc.) to another; it is never identical, so that room must be allowed for improvisation and variation of the practice. This fact is proven in the condition that if workers 'work to rule' this is a form of sabotage.

We know that intrinsic motivation is more productive than motivation by only extrinsic material incentives and control. More regulation and regimentation of work weakens the appeal to professional ethics and pride and the challenge to prevent or repair errors, and they create the inclination to shirk and hide in the loopholes in the rules and to see this as legitimate (otherwise the loopholes would have been closed): 'it serves them right that they did not think of that'. 'If I am not trusted, why should I be trustworthy?' 'If I am told what to do I will no longer think of what it is right to do.' Due to the increasing complexity of control systems their design is increasingly delegated to specialized consultants. We get entangled in a vicious circle where managers lose authority because they no longer control the control that obstructs professional work: professional workers lose authority because they can no longer offer professional quality and attention to special cases, or are no longer motivated to do so, and this fuels a further tightening of control.

While I am of course sympathetic to ideals of universal equality under the law and freedom of expression, even there I have no faith in their strict universality. Such principles should apply in the same way for different people under the same circumstances, though those circumstances are never identical. When found guilty of child abuse, a teacher at a kindergarten or primary school receives a heavier sentence than most other people. We take into account someone's position as a role model, the anguish caused and the violation of trust. We limit freedom of expression when it incites

terrorism. Freedom of expression does not guarantee that one is heard. To disarm criticism it is often more effective to ignore an opinion, or ridicule it, or to undermine its credibility than to forbid or punish it, which may attract more rather than less attention.

Across nations we are in need of a minimum of common practicable moral norms, rules, rights and duties, though these can with some effort, and no doubt imperfectly, be agreed upon from diverse underlying ethical, religious or philosophical views of humanity and society, as argued by Taylor (2011).

The Enlightenment was a killer of old dragons of faith, prejudice, discrimination and hierarchies, but it erected its own metaphysics of universal reason and the universal good, established in the name of universal humanity, as a new society. One exemplar of that is the French revolution, which went awry in a 'virtuous terror' in the name of freedom, equality and brotherhood, in which the individual was sacrificed at the guillotine. The Enlightenment elevated thought; but if that thought did not fit into the ideology, the head that contained the thought was chopped off. And that was only the beginning.

A second exemplar of a state oriented by Enlightenment ideals was the US. The realization of those ideals has been very limited, and universalistic pretensions have been misused for a striving for hegemony and occupation of countries (Iraq) that was accompanied by a suspension of civil rights (e.g. torture) that entails a denial of Enlightenment ideals (Neiman 2009). The greatest disenchantment came with the excesses of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century. To what a philosophy of ideal, universal ideas can lead has been shown before in the ideal state of Plato,<sup>1</sup> where there already was an iron curtain that kept citizens in and foreign, contaminating influences out. Plato and Socrates admired the totalitarian state of Sparta, the rival of democratic Athens.

Yet, as I indicated before, I would not want to renounce the ideals of the Enlightenment. The question is how we can maintain them while allowing for imperfect rationality, the role of feelings and emotions, the role of the social and of history in ideas and ideals, and the variety and context-dependence of the meanings of its terms, such as autonomy, freedom and human dignity, without thereby falling into radical postmodern relativism in which no intersubjective judgement or debate is possible.

Neiman (2009) briskly pleads for the restoration of Enlightenment ideals and resists the cynical view that ideals always only mask interests and power play and that we therefore must renounce or even condemn them. We should not equate ideals with ideology. I agree. Ideals are ideas of how the world should be arranged. On the basis of justice, for example. Ideologies are ideas that direct our actions. Those need not be ideals but could, for example, be ideas of how the world in fact works, such as on the basis of egotism or 'might is right'. However, we must not ignore the fact that, in

each attempt to realize an ideal, its implementation and specification, and the interpretation of its terms, is inevitably and largely subconsciously formed by experience and the social and historical environment and is biased by self-interest. This is not a reason to renounce the ideals but to open their specification and implementation to critical debate. It is especially such debate, and not the blindness of prejudice and bias, that one should see as being in the spirit of the Enlightenment and of humanism. Take for example the ideal of justice. As indicated before, Nussbaum (2006) shows that the elaboration of that ideal, e.g. by Rawls, excludes different classes of deprived people. That was not the intention, and it is good that someone has pointed it out.

In all speaking and listening there are mutually hidden interests and meanings; but that is no reason to give up these actions. The other is often in a better position than you to detect the ideology in the practice of your ideals, or to suspect it unjustly where it is not present. In both cases dialogue is needed. It is also needed because of the ideology that you suspect in the other. The challenge is to lift this dialogue from the level of individuals to that of states, in an intercultural dialogue. And if after all the commitment of effort, knowledge and capabilities of empathy and trust the dialogue stalls, one can only fall back on one's own conviction – and one should have the courage to do so.

Thus, perhaps the 'beyond the Enlightenment' that I announced earlier may be seen not as a rejection of the Enlightenment but as an improvement of it, or, even better, a more realistic approximation of its ideals, similar to my efforts to go beyond humanism.

### **Beyond nationalism**

In recoil from the current re-emergence of nationalism many people plead for a return to the ideals of the Enlightenment, but they do not see that some, perhaps the most important, reasons for a rebirth of nationalism lie in perceived shortcomings of the Enlightenment. We cannot go back and we must move forward.

The political ideology of the more radical Enlightenment is that of a constructible society, in contrast with the conservative vision that it is not mankind that creates society but, on the contrary, society that makes mankind, while society itself evolves organically in ways that mankind can hardly influence. Humanity and its thinking are rooted in the past, and the prejudice this offers is comforting. Convinced that it emancipates humanity the Enlightenment only succeeds in uprooting it (Finkelkraut 1987, p. 37). According to Ernest Renan (a nineteenth-century philosopher and political theorist), 'on the day that France beheaded its king it committed suicide' (*ibid.*, p. 46). Note that I am not myself surrendering to conservatism. That is all too often an excuse to leave alone existing systems of power, the result of intellectual laziness and

a lack of creativity. Also in an 'organic' evolution of society there are learning processes and discoveries from human experience and debate, and people have influence through political processes, inventions, entrepreneurship, literary work and perhaps even philosophy. While it is a given that humanity develops in the feeding ground of culture in a given place at a given time, that does not mean one must linger in it or worship it.

A ground for nationalism is that in their imperfect rationality people are moved by emotions, a craving for a cultural home that yields a sense of belonging and identity, for recognition and feeling of roots in nature and the body, for recognition of their uniqueness, their distinction from others that the Enlightenment does not offer, and also the comfort of prejudice. People are seeking to escape from the impersonality and inhumanity of abstract universals in a personal commitment to a felt ideal. Some philosophers from the moderate mainstream Enlightenment, such as Montesquieu and Hume, recognized this; but the radicals did not. Here also lies the inspiration of Kierkegaard. People seek to escape from feelings of alienation in mass society, in labour that is subjected to the logics of markets, technologies and globalization. That sense of alienation inspired Marxism and the movement of existential thought, following from Kierkegaard through Nietzsche and Heidegger to Sartre, but which seems to have petered out without offering salvation. To fill the void people now again seek recourse in romantic nationalism.

The German philosophers Herder and Fichte instigated romantic nationalism, based on national myths that are indeed mostly myth and invention rather than historical fact. However, as Taylor (2011) asks: does this fully account for the present day revival of nationalism? I will return to this question after a discussion of identity.

The problem of nationalism is this. We need to exercise great caution in attempts to bring back national spirit as it is rooted in nature, body and location (blood and soil), the emotions and the differences between people who have escaped universals, because they can form the basis for fascism. As Levinas pointed out, an emotional source of fascism is the search for sense-making, an escape from the fear of death and the fragility of existence in an intense, amoral life of existential thrills for violence and suppression. We have seen to what a nationalism infused with such sentiments can lead. A flight from universals into personal peculiarities contributes to egotism and narcissism. Taylor (2011) claims that beyond romantic nationalism, or next to it, in contrast with older societies based on hierarchy and authority, democracy requires a 'strong sense of common identity ... so that being a citizen will take precedence over a host of other poles of identity, such as family, class, gender, even (perhaps especially) religion' (p. 90). Such a collective identity is needed for people to see themselves reflected in it; to answer questions of what/for whom; to yield legitimating ideas without which people would not be willing to accept majority voting; and to engage

in solidarity in the payment of taxes, performance of civic duties, etc. 'Nationalism has become the most readily available motor of patriotism' and 'Instead of seeing liberal institutions as uncomplicatedly universal, nationalism accredited the idea that in each society they must be tailored to the particular genius of the people' (p. 91).

I wonder how strong such a collective identity needs to be and how distinctive it is between different democratic states. With a view to history I am deeply suspicious of the notion of 'the particular genius of the people'. What we need is common law and practicable rules and moral norms, and there also the principle applies that we should be able to achieve and maintain these even from a variety of underlying ethical, religious and philosophical views, with multiple identities. Taylor allows for this between nations but apparently not within them. I do: different ethical, religious and philosophical views may allow for common norms of conduct. However, Taylor (2011, p. 311) does grant that principles of equality, freedom, human rights, the rule of law and democracy can be endorsed from a variety of deeper convictions, such as Kantian ethics, utilitarianism and Christian inspiration. As traditional foundations erode we need a replacement, and that, I argue, is the ethic of critical dialogue, of otherhumanism, of seeking a horizontal transcendence, as argued in the present book.

In addition to this we need some common understanding and focus of 'how we do things here'. For example, the Netherlands is known for its bent towards deliberation, in what is called the 'polder model', and if you are not willing to engage in that, or you lack the patience, your position becomes awkward. With this bent the Netherlands is in a good position to develop otherhumanism, if it can overcome its present wave of intolerance.

However, this remains only a part of an identity, or one of several identities. In a modern western state a Buddhist or Muslim could learn to live with common laws, rules, and habits without giving up his or her religious identity. Or in words that I use elsewhere in this book: cognitive distance (including moral and cultural distance) must be limited but may still be substantial. Distance must be sufficiently limited to allow for democratic deliberation and for voices to be heard, and here I think I reach agreement again with Taylor. He does recognize that national identity 'is distinct from the identities of its members ... the identities of individuals and constituent groups will generally be richer and more complex, as well as being often quite different from each other' (ibid., p. 316).

I repeat that strong brands of nationalism are ominous. Here also Taylor (2011, p. 319) admits that 'a really diverse democracy can't revert to a civil religion or anti-religion, however comforting this might be, without betraying its own principles'. Indeed, as he says, the fundamental issue is dealing with diversity. I would add that one can learn to cross cognitive distance and develop an ability to deal with greater distances. Often, nationalist rhetoric aims to reduce not expand that ability. As we move further away from earlier

mentalities and routines of hierarchy and authority, and we become more adept at democracy, national identity can weaken.

## Culture

How about culture, then? The term 'culture' has several meanings. First, there is culture as created by humans, in contrast with nature. Second, there is culture in the sense of cultural heritage and cultural productions, such as history, language, literature, art, music, architecture, fashion, etc. Third, there is culture in the anthropological sense, as an institution, as a set of shared opinions, views and perceptions that are largely tacit, subconscious, acquired in education and other forms of socialization, which give content, direction and limits to intentionality, goals and norms, ethics, action and social competencies. They form the basis for social interaction and determine what are legitimate goals and actions.

Emphasis is usually laid on national culture, and that has to do with the importance of language. However, there is culture on different levels, above and below the national level. Thus there is a culture of organizations that yield a 'cognitive focus' for thought and action within an organization: what, roughly, one strives for; the kind of knowledge that counts; the visions of people and their interaction; how people deal with each other and the environment of the organization; the rules of conduct; the forms of reporting and communication; role models; etc. (Schein 1985; Nooteboom 2009). This is expressed and supported by cultural productions, such as myths, symbols, rituals and jargon. This may concern firms but also other organizations such as societies, clubs, associations and parties to which one belongs. Above the national level there are also shared institutions, such as laws, regulations, customs and shared history (e.g. in Europe, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment), multi-linguisticity and business relations. There are also boundary-crossing cultural productions, in cultural exchange, publications, conferences, exhibitions, theatre, film, etc. Higher levels of culture pervade lower levels, and lower levels contribute to the structuration of higher levels. Thus a French cultural feature of centralization and hierarchy is part of the organizational culture of, say, a French bank, while mergers and acquisitions between banks from different countries contribute to a shift of French culture. Later, in Chapter 5, I will further discuss the relations between different levels of culture and the relation to identity.

'Culture' may also refer to the use of the cultural means of literature, science and art from a diversity of sources, for the sake of shifting spiritual horizons and for liberation from prejudice. This is the meaning of 'culture' for Montaigne, for example. 'Culture' can also refer to the assimilation of national culture, on the basis of some historical canon, for example. It would be tragic if the first notion of 'culture' were subordinated to the second. One does not choose for a national culture but is impregnated by it

(Finkelkraut 1987), in a confirmation rather than a breaking of prejudice. Yet nationalist culture is based on an invented history, a mystification of historical events and tales. Present Dutch nationalism builds on a myth of unity that is blatantly at odds with the actual history of internal strife and civil war. Finkelkraut (1987, p. 112) noted that since around 1980 UNESCO assumes that people derive their being from the society to which they belong. While in racism people are locked up in their biological heritage, now they are locked up in their national cultural heritage.

A totalitarian system can arise from subjugation of the individual to both a collective national spirit and a universal ideal. Romantic nationalism of the national spirit resists the universalism of the Enlightenment with an appeal to diversity and particularity of national cultures rooted in the climate, location, language, religion, laws, customs and history of a people. That is not the particularity of the specific, unique individual but of the collective of a national culture to which the individual must dedicate him or herself. In both cases the individual is subjugated. One can be bitten by the cat or by the dog. The ideal of universal ideals of the good, true and beautiful mostly lead to the elevation to that status of the insights and practices of a dominant coalition or elite. Paradoxically, universals are myopic and prejudiced. At first, the institution of the United Nations was a return to Enlightenment thought; but it led to the elevation of the current views of Western societies to the status of the universally good civilization that should now be brought to the rest of the world.

Meanwhile the shame of such cultural imperialism has, on the rebound, led to an extreme cultural relativism in which differences in national culture are taken as a given about which no judgement or debate is possible. From this perspective one can see every foreign influence as a contagion, a soiling, which one cannot possibly allow to be assimilated. Integration, in-between exclusion and assimilation, is impossible in a culture that is internally homogeneous and has no overlap with other cultures. One either fits in or stands outside. On the other hand, from that perspective, a multicultural society in which cultures co-exist without overlap, interaction and common values is also unworkable. We seem to be caught in a dilemma, between on the one hand the impossibility of a democracy without shared perspectives and values and on the other hand a democracy based on romantic nationalism that imposes homogeneity and which cannot tolerate diversity and thereby fails as a democracy.

But all this is nonsensical from the beginning. If the human being in his or her perception, thinking, feeling and judging is rooted in a community, and is formed by it, then who is to say that by definition that community is only or foremost a national one, and not also one of family, school, work, profession, job, church or sport? We should recognize that an individual has a multiple identity that taps into a multitude of sources, in which indeed one's own environment plays a central role, but that is in the first place an environment of family, school, etc., which in turn is indeed embedded in

a national culture yet also extends across national boundaries (WRR 2007). People can differ in their national background and yet achieve common understanding and judgement via a shared workplace or profession. A multicultural society is workable and meaningful only if one shifts from culture as national identity to culture as diverse (within nations and peoples), with opportunities for ties and novel combinations within and between them. Then differences in culture may remain difficult and a source of tension, but they also offer opportunities for new insights and possibilities. In my work on organization and economics I have shown how differences ('cognitive distance') and the bridging of them can contribute to learning and innovation. The capability to cross such distance is something one can develop.

I do not see why it should be impossible to have a combination of national and transnational values, with the first supporting national states and the second international relations, in something like a matrix of values perhaps, with national columns and international rows cutting across them – and in time a shift of elements from the columns to the rows – in an ongoing European integration.

The social and political problem then seems to be this. Multiple identities have corresponding, partly overlapping but distinct networks of people, associated with family, neighbourhood, job, profession, education, sport, etc., with these networks increasingly becoming international. For example, in Europe, integration has produced cross-national networks of trade, production, culture, policy and bureaucracy. Such cross-border networks constrain international conflict, which is why the EU was instituted. However, not everyone possesses such social capital, with access to networks. Access depends on education and background. Access also feeds upon itself. Membership of one network gives access to others by way of their overlap. Deliberation across national borders limits access and jeopardizes democratic deliberation that is still concentrated within states. Not having much access and being unable to manage multiple networks, people who are left out feel underprivileged, and then national identity, which every regular member of a state can claim, is the categorical identity they resort to, next to family and neighbourhood. Foundations of nationalism are sought in land (soil), language, religion, ethnicity or republican ideals (e.g. *laïcité* in France). Land of residence no longer works when outsiders reside there as well. Hence the importance of language, and its easy use for discrimination against immigrants, as a shibboleth. Of course a differentiation of language within a nation is also used to set apart elites, but there is enough of a shared basis to set the nation apart from others. Nationalism also helps to restrain inaccessible cross-national networks of decision-making. All this, I think, yields a more up to date account of the present re-emergence of nationalism, which is not to say that the old urge of romantic nationalism is no longer at play. Indeed, it is still very much part of the present revival of nationalism.

An alternative to a flight into nationalism is the creation of a new identity and corresponding exclusive network of one's own, such as a religious denomination (Taylor 2011), a society of freemasons or a gang of Hell's angels, hooligans or criminals.

Past societies were hierarchical, built upon rank, social standing and station in life determined by birth. Access to rights and privileges was indirect, through tutelage, along channels of rank and status. In modern democracies, by contrast, access is supposed to be direct, in active and passive voting and equality under the law (Taylor 2011). That at least is the myth, but the reality is that access depends on social capital and the networks associated with multiple identities, with the well-educated, well-placed and cosmopolitan citizens taking precedence. There may even be a new hierarchy of networks, which is more insidious than the hierarchy of rank or station for being less visible, unrecognized or even denied. For example, there are networks of business leaders who sit on each other's supervisory boards, and networks of policy-makers and leaders of interest groups such as employers associations, arts councils, urban planning and many others. This gives the less privileged a sense of disenfranchisement from 'the elite'. They grasp nationalism as an accessible claim of their own, and this nationalism is filled with resentment against the elite.

Nationalist populists can mobilize such resentment and suspicion of elites, projecting themselves as champions of the disenfranchised. They can exploit nationalist elements such as land, language, culture, ethnicity and religion and in doing so profit from a human instinct of suspicion of outsiders, of non-members. This is effective especially with the claim that the outsiders are threatening to encroach upon networks still available to the underprivileged, such as those of family, neighbourhood and work.

In seeking recognition of the particular, in resistance to Enlightenment universalism, why stop at the national level? Why not go down to the individual? That going down has also happened in the rise of the self. But if in this way we bring culture down to the level of differentiated individuals, don't we step into the trap of postmodernism, with relativism extending down to that level of individuals where each determines his or her own culture on the basis of the most bewildering collections of fragments, with every choice claiming that it is a 'culture', that all opinions are as good as any others, that amateurism is as good as professionalism, and that no judgement on the good, the true and the beautiful are any longer possible and that only mindless consumerism remains? Where all bases for judgement and debate disappear only indifference remains, and, beyond that arbitrariness, where right becomes based on might.

### **Naturalism without reductionism**

While I am critical of the content of Enlightenment thought, especially its excessive universalism and the notion of the rational, self-transparent,

# PROOF

Which Avenues? 59

autonomous self, I am aware that much of my thinking carries the stamp of the Enlightenment, among other things in a great deal of naturalism, and this in two meanings. First, I shy away from metaphysics in the sense of an appeal to knowledge of things that lie outside our knowledge, or claims of absolute truth, though I do think that some metaphysical speculation about the relation between cognition and reality is indispensable. In my view knowledge arises from experience of human beings in relations with the natural and social environment, and claims of truth lie in argumentation in debate on the basis of perception, conceptualization and logic that are imperfect and cannot be claimed to give access to an objective reality as it is 'in itself', which makes intersubjective debate all the more important.

Second, I make use of insights in the nature of the human being, in mind and body, especially in its development during the life of the individual (ontogenesis) as well in the evolution of the human species (phylogenesis). I use phenomena of ordinary human behaviour and experience and insights from science, such as cognitive science, social psychology and evolutionary theory. For example, I subject claims concerning cognition to insights from neural science and experimental social psychology, and I test their tenability or plausibility with regard to their viability in the evolution of humanity, in cognitive development during life, and in the development of society. For example, in a discussion of free will we cannot ignore results from neural and behavioural research of the importance of subconscious mental and bodily processes.

Incidentally, Nietzsche also was a naturalist in this sense, at least in some of his work where he sought consistency with scientific practice and with what was known by science (especially in *Human, All Too Human*) and where he sought explanations from the development of society (in *The Genealogy of Morality*). However, he rejected evolutionary thinking in the form of Darwinism in favour of his 'genealogical method' of analysing developments in the light of societal logics; and in my view that analysis is valuable.

However, my naturalism does not necessarily entail reductionism – that rigorous reduction of everything to physics, supposing we knew for sure what the ultimate basis of that is. According to reductionism objects consist of particles, 'hence' explanation must be sought there. Consciousness is based on the brain, which works on the basis of neurons; 'hence' its explanation should be sought there. And then we find that 'we are our brain'. While the behaviour of human beings is ultimately generated in chemical and physical processes this does not imply that the 'logic' and causality of human behaviour conform to those of such processes.

Reductionism is also a historical mistake. Aristotle propounded a multiple causality: an *efficient cause*, 'that which acts' (think of a carpenter); a *formal cause*, how and on the basis of what knowledge or technology one does something (the craft of the carpenter); a *material cause*, that which one operates on (wood for a piece of furniture); an *exemplary cause*, the model

for an operation (a model, drawing, design); a *final cause*, the objective or purpose of an operation (income, exercise of skill, calling); and a *conditional cause*, which enables or constrains the operation of the other causes (the regulations that a carpenter must satisfy, the market structure). Aristotle also applied his causality to nature; but it is no longer seen to apply there. Planets do not have a goal they move towards. For that reason Aristotelian causality has ended up on the garbage heap of the history of thought. It was replaced by a single, mechanistic intuition of causality, such as the collision of billiard balls, an intuition that has been applied to behavioural science. But there is an irony of history here, for the multiple causality of Aristotle finds a natural and obvious application in this science. In economics there is constant talk of efficient causes in the form of entrepreneurs, managers, labour and consumers; of the material cause of materials used in production; of the formal cause of science and technology of the final cause in the form of incentives and goals; of the exemplary cause of established practice; and of conditional causes in the form of markets, regulation and other institutions.

Suppose you are a reductionist. How far 'down' do you go? What is the lowest level for 'proper' causality? The 'firing' of neurons is an electro-chemical process, on the basis of molecules, which consist of atoms, which consist of elementary particles, which are based in fundamental forces that may have to be seen as 'strings'. We aren't sure yet. So, to be consistent we have to move down to the level where we no longer know. In what way would that be better than surrendering it all to the belief in God? And how far 'up' does reductionism go? Must we reduce society via people and biology to vibrating strings? How is that to be done?

Concepts and explanatory principles at higher levels are routinely different from those at underlying levels. Think of Boyle's law, from secondary school physics. The law says that for a given amount of gas in a compressible chamber, at a constant temperature, pressure is inversely proportional to volume. This is an experimental law (discovered in 1662) that 76 years later could be explained at a lower level in terms of gas particles bumping into the chamber's walls. But in the law itself there is no reference to particles.

How about the brain? Thinking is based in the activity of neurons, but it has its own forms of explanation that do not refer to neurons. Thus, according to social psychologists our thinking is much influenced by 'priming': action and cues create a disposition to think something. Show someone an image of grief and he or she is inclined to view a situation more negatively. Is that invalid as long as we cannot reduce it to firing neurons?

An important point is, however, that while a higher level theory need not be set in terms of lower level processes it should not be in contradiction with what is known there. A theory of thought is not a theory of neurons, but it should not be in contradiction with what is possible at the level of neurons.

Take a group of people. That group cannot exist without the people of which it consists, but psychology alone cannot explain all its behaviour, let alone a theory of elementary particles. Here economics is mistaken in its *methodological individualism*: the principle that all conduct in the economy must be explained from the individual. It runs aground if you accept that thinking and choosing arise in interaction between people. A group is egoistic in more ways than an individual. For example, in groups there may arise prisoner's dilemmas, as indicated earlier. In groups there are reputation mechanisms. There is a range of network effects. Sociology cannot be reduced to psychology, though it should not be in conflict with it.

Causal effects not only go 'up' but also 'down'. Group conduct is built up from individual conduct but also affects it, in the generation of knowledge, opinions and emotions of individuals and thereby affects their mental development. The development of the body arises from the potential given in the genes but depends also on the environment that affects gene expression. According to Damasio (2010) bodily processes yield representations or 'maps' of the body in the brain, which in turn affect the body. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

## Evolution

In this book evolution plays an important role, in two ways. First, biological evolution and its derivatives form an important testing ground for hypotheses about the human being. Is whatever is claimed tenable in the light of evolution? In what way, for example, could an inclination towards trust and altruism have survived in evolution to become an inborn 'instinct'? Here lies a fundamental point. Many philosophers assumed a *conatus essendi*, the presence of a fundamental urge to survive in everything that lives. In earlier philosophy this idea could not be based on evolutionary theory. Schopenhauer for example thought that from introspection, and in the experience of the role of his own will, he could conclude that the will to survive is the fundamental principle behind everything. For him this meant that egoism rules all, that mankind is wolf to mankind. Hence the deep pessimism of his philosophy. In Chapter 10 I will show that evolutionary theory not only confirms the urge to survive but also indicates a basis for altruism.

There are complications here. Evolutionary thinking about human behaviour has diffused and branched into different streams (Laland and Brown 2008). One is 'socio-biology', the analysis of human behaviour from the perspective of the 'selfish gene'. A second is 'behavioural ecology', which tries to explain human conduct (e.g. in foraging) from the hypothesis of optimal reproductive success, without indicating how that works in terms of genes, physiology or psychology. A third is 'evolutionary psychology', which tries to explain behaviour on the basis of cognitive or

psychological mechanisms that developed in past evolution (and may no longer be adaptive under current conditions), without indicating how this works in terms of physiology.

All these developments are both interesting and problematic, in one way or another. They yield some striking and analytically impressive results, but are fragmented and sometimes contradictory. Some actions that appear to be altruistic can often be accounted for also on the basis of the hypothesis that at some time in the evolution of humanity an advantage emerged and 'hence' was a matter of self-interest and has left a trace in our genes. That hypothesis is often impossible to test empirically. If, on the other hand, one holds the thesis that it is a matter of altruism, that also cannot be empirically tested and one must somehow make it plausible how it might have survived in evolution, without being wiped out by instincts of egotism. Then it does not suffice to say that altruism is good for the group because it is not at that level but at the level of the individual that genes are inherited.

Evolutionary theories mostly limp on one leg, and to go forward we need to add the other leg in the form of social, institutional and cultural effects in terms of how genes are 'expressed', i.e. how and to what extent the potential that is embodied in genes develops into actual characteristics and conduct, and how conduct yields effects. Earlier I noted how social mechanisms such as prisoner's dilemmas, and a lack of institutions to break through them, could affect outcomes. Institutions and culture can contribute to the survival and genetic transmission of characteristics that, without them, could not have maintained themselves.

Important as genes are, I (and most researchers in the broad area of evolution) do not believe in genetic determinism. Much of what we think and do is shaped by what we inherit from evolution, but this evolutionary disposition or potential shapes properties and actions, for better or worse, in interaction with the cultural and social environment. Genetic potential is culturally played out (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008). People differ in both genetic heritage and cultural and social environment. Nevertheless, they also share a genetic heritage. The question is not only what our genetic heritage is but also how its effects can be turned by culture. We may develop things that 'are not in our genes' and yield something we can rely on without our genes sneakily creeping through the gaps and leading us astray. Here the question is, in particular, to what extent it is in our genes to be egoistic or altruistic, and how cultural and social institutions may help to balance them. Trust is needed for community, and community is needed for trust. This is an important issue in this book. I will turn to it in the last chapter, combining considerations from genetics and culture (including social mechanisms and institutions).

Second, evolution plays an important role as a logic of development that may also apply outside biology, in economics, learning and discovery, politics and culture. The basic logic of generalized evolutionary theory is

that new forms (of technology, products, ideas, institutions) arise not from conscious, targeted, rational design but from selection from elements in a repertoire of alternatives that have arisen more or less haphazardly, by elimination or relative advantage on the basis of survival conditions and opportunities in a given environment, which upon survival are amplified or multiplied. The basic processes are those of variety generation, selection and amplification/transmission.

In economics variety generation is invention and innovation; selection is done in markets and by institutions; and transmission lies in imitation of success, training and education. The art of economic policy is not to take over from the mechanisms of evolution, i.e. not to plan and program science, innovation and entrepreneurship, but to affect evolutionary processes by which they may flourish. In a closer analysis of how the basic logic of evolution is realized in processes, fundamental differences arise between biological and societal evolution (Nooteboom 2009). In economics selection mostly occurs on the basis of competition, in democracy on the basis of values and voting. These processes have their own 'logics'.

First, in economics and democracy the selection conditions are more amenable to manipulation by the units of selection than in biology: entrepreneurs can reshape markets and politicians can reshape values and elections. The institutions that form part of the selection environment are shaped by a complex interaction of individuals and collective actors (such as organizations). They enable action, contribute to its form, select it but are also shaped by it. Second, while there is much trial and error in variety generation it is not entirely blind or random but informed to some extent by learning from experience in the selection process. Third, transmission is based on communication, and in communication meanings are not replicated but shifted, complemented or transformed, and this forms part of the generation of variety. To the extent that one can shape one's own selection environment, and selection and transmission are part of variety generation, evolution may go awry or turn into something different from evolution. For evolution in society we must study cognition and language, which may have features that are *sui generis* and may not be completely amenable to evolutionary logic.

In the chapters on cognition and language I will make some use of evolutionary theory. In Chapter 5 on cognition I offer a theory of discovery that may or may not be seen as evolutionary. In Chapter 6 on language, among other things I will speculate (so far with little or no scientific foundations, I will admit) that our language and concepts are biased towards metaphors taken from phenomena of objects and their movement in space, since they were, and to a large extent still are, of dominant importance to our survival, while they may be totally inappropriate for abstract concepts such as knowledge, meaning, identity and being. Here I am turning around, one could say, Kant's view that our observation of phenomena is shaped by mental

categories of time, space and causality into the claim that mental categories are shaped by evolution and experience in time, space and physical causality and are misleadingly applied to things not in time and space.

The evolutionary perspective reveals a second problem of universals, next to the ethical implications, discussed earlier, of neglect and subordination of individuals. Universals can, in a totalitarian system, form an obstacle for diversity or its expression that form a basic condition for evolution and self-organization. Without diversity there is no innovation or adjustment to novel conditions. That was the fundamental problem of communist societies. However, diversity is of no use if there is no connection between the diverse individuals or groups needed to utilize diversity. We should strive for independence without isolation. The problem of a multicultural society is not its diversity but the threat of isolation between its parts. A totalitarian society represses independence but a libertarian system in which only self-interest counts yields isolation. This theme of connecting diversity is an important element of the present book.

### Philosophy

Before I criticize any philosopher, let me say that I can see truth or interest in most philosophies. I believe that philosophy is contingent upon character, experience and the time in which it arises. If I had lived in Plato's time, confronted with the rhetorical vagaries and trickery of the Sophists, I might well have pleaded against opinion and ambiguity in favour of objective, universal truth and logical rigour. Platonic thought was a great temptation to me in my youth. In this book I criticize Enlightenment thought but when I watch the emerging dominance of opinion over fact, feeling over argument, emotion over thought, I am tempted to plead for a return to it. Here I discuss the downside of universals, but I would also defend them against the hatred of abstraction in the cacophony of particularities of present public discourse and the mess of thought, or lack of it, in the media.

There is a great danger in founding our thinking on what we think exists in reality (ontology), because the foundations of that thought are to a large extent based on our evolutionary cognitive heritage and on personal experience, as a result of which so-called realistic thought can become a form of narcissism, as Levinas argued. And that is precisely what we want to get away from. As I indicated before, this means that some form of metaphysics is inevitable in philosophical thought. And then it becomes difficult to speak clearly about what does not fit clearly in our perceived reality. That is why at times the work of philosophers, that of Levinas not excepted, is so damnably unclear. It is unfortunate that some of the French and German philosophers are so inordinately difficult to understand. One reads a sentence, and again and again, and still one cannot grasp what is said – but we should try. And then it is not easy to separate the unnecessarily obscure,

# PROOF

*Which Avenues?* 65

the lack of intellectual discipline, the giving in to verbosity and posturing, of which I am sure there is much around, from the inevitably ambiguous that arises from trying to think and say things that do not fit into existing thought. Therefore, if something seems incomprehensible one ought to give it the benefit of the doubt. Meanwhile I aim to remain as clear as possible, even in inevitable ambiguity.

Of course I am not the first on the path that I take with this book. Nietzsche, Marx, Freud and twentieth-century French philosophers (Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Deleuze, Irigaray, Derrida) began earlier to dismantle the detached, autonomous, rational, self-transparent self and the corresponding humanism. In my discussion there are also connections with the thought of the earlier sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philosophers Montaigne and Pascal (who fortunately are easier to grasp). From Pascal (and Merleau-Ponty) I adopt, among other things, the idea that the light of the mind is rooted in the dark of the body (in contrast with Descartes's separation of body and mind). With Pascal I believe that the human being is not transparent to itself, but shot through with ambiguity and contradiction and is a riddle to itself. With Montaigne I see the self as instable and in flux, in an ongoing self-discovery, rooted in the body, personal, original, differentiated from other individuals, having no stable and universal ground and only limited control of itself. From there I argue that, for self-discovery, the self needs other human beings.

I use and refer to elements from the work of diverse philosophers, scholars and scientists. To profit from the full breadth of insights from philosophy I make use, among other sources, of Frederick Coplestone's monumental *History of Philosophy*. I make use, among others, as already indicated, of the work of Nietzsche and Levinas. In a number of respects I am an Aristotelian. Concerning the philosophy of language I make use, among others, of Wittgenstein. The book is shot through with the legacy of the greats from philosophy such as Socrates, Aristotle and Kant. From science I make use of evolutionary theory, the stream of 'embodied cognition' and of social psychology. I make some use of my own earlier work on learning and discovery and on trust.

Such gathering of elements can lead to a bric-a-brac with little coherence and consistency (eclecticism), but I claim a large degree of coherence. Philosophy, like a house of cards, is often a construction of pieces supporting each other. Also, I am fascinated by the phenomenon of certain ideas that appear and re-appear in various guises among different philosophers. For example, in the study of language de Saussure's distinction between '*langue*' and '*parole*' seems akin to Levinas's distinction between '*le dit*' and '*dire*', as I will discuss in Chapter 6, and the ideas of both are clarified, and may support each other, by comparing them. One can find something similar also in Heidegger, but I will not go so far as to include that in the comparison.

My striving for coherence does not mean that I am striving for any complete or fixed philosophical system, which typically entails the claim

of indubitable basic assumptions. I share Nietzsche's suspicion of such systems, though I strive for more coherence than is offered in his aphorisms. Whatever assumptions I make are candidates for revision. Philosophy should remain open, as Bachelard (1975, pp. 9, 12) called it. That attitude is also the true spirit of Enlightenment and humanism. While I strive for coherence, such may not be complete. An important source of inspiration and perhaps the main rope of coherence that ties things together in this book is the idea of pragmatism, of being in the world, and corresponding constructivist theories of cognition and meaning. I am thinking here of American pragmatism (Peirce, William James, Dewey and G. H. Mead) and how it is employed by more contemporary philosophers such as Hans Joas. It is tricky to point to roots in pragmatism since in ordinary language the term is misleadingly interpreted as renouncing ideals and principles, in a muddling through with compromises. My interest in pragmatism is connected with my interest in Nietzsche, who presaged pragmatism with his view that there are no absolute truths and that ideas are useful fictions that serve our goals. However, I do think that our ideas have realism, in a sense. This is connected with the cognitive theory that I employ, discussed in Chapter 5, according to which cognition occurs on the basis of mental categories that are developed in interaction with the physical and especially the social environment. Intelligence is internalized practice. Ideas evolve in adaptation to reality, as a function of their success in action, and in that sense reflect reality, though this is not reflection as in a mirror. This applies to ideas in scientific knowledge as well as in ethics.

Concerning truth, the view is often somewhat misleadingly ascribed to pragmatism that something is true to the extent that it 'works' in practice. Taken literally of course that is nonsense. Lies can work very well but they are not true. It makes more sense if we interpret 'working' also as contributing to our practical understanding, in the explanation of phenomena in terms of causal or logical implications or antecedents that we use in our dealings with the world. We adopt ideas to guide our actions, and in the actions we adapt the ideas. Utility is not a precondition for thought, not a dictate to science to be practical, but a recognition that experience with success and failure in action informs thought. There is no absolute truth, only a process that proceeds in the relation of the human being to itself, the other and the world. Truth is not something eternal that we contemplate, as in Platonic philosophy, but something that develops in the world, in action. We find this idea also in existentialism, as in Heidegger's idea that the sense of existence lies in becoming, in actions in the world. I wonder whether perhaps this connects even with Hegel's dictum that the rational is the real, if we take into account that 'real' here is a translation of the German '*wirklich*', which literally means 'workable'. The existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1995: 28) wrote: 'I must experience the goal why I transcend myself as a point of departure for a new transcendence' and 'The human

# PROOF

*Which Avenues?* 67

being in its creativity leans on a previous creation to create the possibility of a new creation’.

To continue in the line of pragmatist thought, and to show how, in Simone de Beauvoir’s words, one can employ ‘a previous creation to create the possibility of a new creation’, in Chapter 5 I propose a cycle of interaction between on the one hand cognition and language and on the other hand action, in which knowledge and meaning are applied (or better: exercised) in action and there run into limitations and novel challenges that lead to an adaptation or transformation of knowledge and meaning. For an elaboration of that in earlier work (Nootboom 2000) I was inspired by the work of the developmental psychologist Jean Piaget. I will use his work also in the chapters on cognition and language. Different people have developed their cognition along different life paths and will therefore see and evaluate the world more or less differently. That leaves little room for an absolutist philosophy that claims absolute truths, regardless of circumstance and detached from developmental and operative history.

I can also summarize my position as follows. The old ideal of a *correspondence* view of truth is transformed into a *coherence* view. We cannot for each element of knowledge descend from our mind to check how it is hooked on to the world. We can only confront one bit of knowledge with another, and our own knowledge with that of others, and apply our knowledge until it fails in practice.

# 3

## The History of the Self

For a history of the self I mostly draw on the well-known work of Charles Taylor, in his books *Sources of the Self* (2006) and *A Secular Age* (2007). First I follow his analysis of the ways in which the dominance of the self has been established, and then I trace what effect that has had on benevolence: feeling for other people, compassion, sympathy, empathy, extending benefit of the doubt, and altruism, i.e. the readiness to make sacrifices for others even if, within limits, that goes against self-interest. In Chapter 4 I will discuss self-interest and altruism in detail.

Where does dominance of the self come from? Is it self-evident, inevitable, universal; a part of human nature? Does benevolence require God, as a source of inspiration or as an authority to impose it? Or does it require the promise of the reward of a hereafter to lure us into it? Or is there a basis for it in human nature? It is enlightening to trace the appearance in history of what Taylor (2006, 2007) calls the 'disengaged self'. There are three dimensions to this disengagement. The first is disengagement of the soul from the body, and of rationality from the passions. This was pronounced and influential, in particular, in the thought of Descartes. The second is disengagement of the self from its natural and social environment. A third is a disengagement from 'higher' values that transcend individual human well-being. While in classical philosophy, e.g. Aristotle, rationality referred to a good choice from a hierarchy of values – from the pursuit of happiness to the pursuit of the higher values of the good, the true and the beautiful – later rationality became purely instrumental in the pursuit of human happiness and subsequently the pursuit of the happiness of the disengaged individual. This happiness, however, was never reached. According to Lasch (1991) we have strayed into widespread narcissism in which the self no longer has a core of being but finds an emptiness in itself that it fills with delusions of superiority that it demands to see reflected and confirmed in its environment.

There is a problem with historical explanation, even if one does not adopt a radical relativism of culture, time and place. The development of ideas

is not linear. Elements appear and disappear, often to emerge again in a different form: different lines cross and knot with each other, and unravel and separate. For example, the external as a source of the self moves out of sight in the idea of divine inspiration, philosophical rationalism and idealism, then reappears in the form of philosophical positivism, disappears again in scepticism concerning perception and knowledge, and reappears again, in Levinas, in the form of the other human being. Disengagement of the mind from the emotions also appears, disappears and reappears.

As noted by Taylor, though the history of ideas plays an important role, ideas lead to actions that produce experiences that shift ideas. Actions, and their effects on social structure and institutions, are intervening variables in the effects of ideas on ideas. Ideas yield perceptions, moral and cognitive interpretations and value judgements that lead to choices or inclinations that produce actions that lead to the production of religions and systems of laws, art, literatures, myths, technologies, economies, states, revolutions and wars – and all this produces experiences that shift ideas. Therefore one cannot explain the development of ideas on the basis only of those ideas. If one looks only at the ideas one sees shifts that are incomprehensible if one does not also take into account what they produced and what produced them. Nevertheless an account of the march and stumbling of ideas is enlightening, even without full explanation, and here and there I can add some of the intervening factors.

### **The march to the disengaged self**

After the classical views of Plato and Aristotle that the good and true lie outside the self, in universal ideas that we can try to grasp (Plato) or in forms to which life tends (Aristotle), Augustine (354–430) considered the self as a source of inner light, generated by God, in which the self is transparent to itself, and in which lies the path to God. The internal light is a gift from God and by turning inwards we reach God (Taylor 2006, p. 143). We move, so to say, inwards in order to turn outwards. Mankind has conflicting loves for the self and for higher values, and the light given by God's grace helps us to reconcile them. Augustine condemned the will to dominate, next to sexual lust and the hunger for profit. I mention this in connection with a later discussion of Nietzsche's acceptance and glorification of the 'will to power' and Levinas's reversal of that in an overpowering of the self by the other human being.

In the early humanism of the Renaissance in Italy, at the end of the fifteenth century, the autonomy of the human being, in its capacity to form and give direction to its life, played a central role (see e.g. Lutz 2009). Here humanism is anti-clerical but not yet anti-religious. In the revivalist Neoplatonism (e.g. in the philosophy of Pico della Mirandola) there was a penchant for the absolute, a power and truth transcending reality. A central

figure in the Northern Renaissance was Erasmus, who is seen by some as a precursor or source of inspiration for the Reformation.

With the Reformation, around 1500, religion shifted from a collective experience of everyone being in the same boat (in a world of evil spirits, in which everyone had his or her place and where individual deviance jeopardized the salvation of all) to a direct personal relationship with and dedication to God, without intervention from the church. Individual, ordinary people in their daily life, in ordinary activities, could now have direct access to God. This is the beginning of the emergence of the value of ordinary life that would progressively play a large role.

With his turn inwards Augustine can be seen as a precursor of Descartes, though with the latter the self stays in itself, as a source of morality. Our capacity to reason construes both knowledge and morality, and is master of the passions. Here we see a double disengagement of self – from passions and from the world. There is no longer a grasping of an external reality but a construction of it according to innate ideas. Our grasp of reality is guaranteed because a veracious God instils our ideas in us. Descartes recognized that passions, as animal impulses, function in order to orient us towards well-being and survival, but they are subject to the instrumental control of reason, directed by free will. This is a further elaboration of the disengagement of the self from the body and passions. The outcome is a radical shift from the classical Greek idea of the good and the true as lying outside us to the idea that they form the content of the soul itself, in a separation of subject and object.

Locke denied innate ideas, and he thought that the mind yields a passive and veracious mirror of reality, in elements of perception that form building blocks for the composition of further ideas on the basis of association. Here there is an orientation of the self to the outside, an assimilation of building blocks of knowledge from outside to inside, and thus there is no disconnection from the world, though there still is a disconnection from the body and the passions. As with Descartes, people have free will and rational control of their passions. Action is driven by self-preservation as a law of nature, and a striving for pleasure and avoidance of pain, but since all people are part of divine creation people must strive for preservation of the whole of humanity. Rationality includes common interest. There is no conflict between the flourishing of mankind and higher values.

Counter to the Cartesian and Lockean vision of a stable self (that is disengaged from the passions and the body, and that is transparent to the self and in rational self-control) is the view, which goes back to Montaigne and Pascal. With Montaigne there is an unstable self in flux, always changing, in ongoing self-discovery, rooted in the body: a self that is personal, original and differentiated from other individuals and that cannot find a stable, universal foundation and has no full control over itself. With Pascal we are not transparent but mysterious to ourselves. This returns later

in the thought of Nietzsche, in Merleau-Ponty's notion that the light of reason is rooted in the dark of the body, and in the thought of Levinas. As will become clear in the course of this book I also think in these terms. 'The Cartesian calls for a radical disengagement from ordinary experience; Montaigne requires a deeper engagement in our particularity' (Taylor 2006, p. 182). The latter idea we also find again in the Romantic period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

What all these views except that of Levinas have in common is the turn inside. So far we have two forms of an Augustinian turn inward: self-control and self-exploration. Nietzsche, in my view, falls into the second tradition. Later I will argue, in several places, that self-exploration requires an outward turn, in dialogue with the other human being – and that brings me to Levinas.

The eighteenth century saw the development of deism, with the idea that an impersonal God's creation embraces an all-encompassing providential order including our inclination to the good, in harmony with that creation. According to Hutcheson, Lockean ideas that are passively absorbed without formative interpretation also include moral insight, placed in us by God as part of His creation, which motivates us to benevolence, as part of a natural Lockean striving for pleasure. Here we see a turn inside to 'moral sentiments' that are part of a divine order. In the second half of the eighteenth century the turn inside leads on to individualism, privacy and intimacy inside the family.

Taylor (2006) has proposed that while in classical thought (Plato, Aristotle) rationality was substantive, i.e. referred to the making of good choices from a hierarchy of good things for a virtuous life, which run from ordinary bodily pleasures to the contemplation of the true and the good, now rationality increasingly becomes more procedural and instrumental in a pursuit of optimal pleasure as the only good.

In contrast with the Augustinian view that love for the higher is granted us by the grace of God, Rousseau proposed that our inner nature is fundamentally good but, instead of the biblical Fall, there is a perversion of this natural good by human culture. The root of evil lies in what others think and expect from us, and the pressure towards the satisfaction of pleasure. People can arrive at a social contract but this must be oriented towards a simple, personal life. This turn of Rousseau deepens the look inside and contributes to the shift from the sublime to ordinary life. The self, not the social, is the source of the self. Later in his life, Rousseau began his *Confessions* with the proclamation that 'I am alone. I read in my heart and know people. I am not as someone who is created by those I have seen' (Safranski 2010, p. 183, my translation).

In the radical Enlightenment, e.g. in the work of Spinoza, the vision of a divine providential order as a source of knowledge and morality shifts to a materialistic view of humanity, in the double sense that the human

being is composed of mechanical forces and is driven to self-preservation, pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Both the radical Enlightenment and most of moderate mainstream Enlightenment rebels against all morality of self-denial and asceticism, and this later found a strong echo in Nietzsche. The idea of a divine providential order that brings only the good became difficult to maintain in the face of the natural disaster of the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 and man-made terror in the form of bloody persecution. The idea of a providential justice was ridiculed in Voltaire's *Candide*.

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romanticism the recognition of moral sentiments (Hutcheson) and the source of benevolence in our inner nature (Rousseau) were followed by a further opening of the self to feelings – which led to a deeper internality (Taylor 2006, p. 284). This was accompanied by a bent towards a 'return to nature' that evokes strong and noble feelings in us. In France this can be seen in a retreat from the formal 'French garden' (originating in Italy) to the wilder, more natural, 'English garden'. 'The affinity between nature and ourselves is now mediated not by an objective rational order but by the way that nature resonates in us' (ibid., p. 299). We 'are defined by purposes and capacities which we discover within ourselves. What nature can now do is awaken these' (ibid., p. 301). Earlier I noted that the thought of Rousseau also contributed to the tendency to appreciate ordinary, daily life. In painting we see in the course of the nineteenth century a shift of interest from the sublime and distinguished to simple labourers, farmers and fishermen as subjects, in their natural environment (for example in the Hague school in the Netherlands).

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romantic movement was strongly influenced by the notion of the inner voice of nature in us that replaced Augustine's notion of the light in us from the grace of God. For some the inner source of nature was part of the encompassing spirit of nature that is reflected in the self. That may resemble the providential order of deism, but there are two differences. One is that the natural force of an '*élan vital*' is not necessarily created by God; and the second is that it operates from an inner voice and feelings rather than as a rational order that governs feelings. Sentiments are no longer the movers of deeds for the good life but have intrinsic value as part of the good life. The realization of nature in us shows itself in the expression of feelings. Reason and sensitivity must be united again. Art is no longer a reflection of perceived nature, but an expression of it. Here we see a return to the Aristotelian notion of the realization of inner potential, though now it is no longer a 'pull' in the direction of an external form as in Aristotle, but a 'push' from inner sources. This also plays a big role for Nietzsche with his Dionysian urge to self-expression and self-transcendence – and in that sense he was a romantic.

The elevation of expression 'was the basis for a new and fuller individuation ... every individual is different and original, and ... this originality determines how he or she ought to live ... every one of us has an

original path that we ought to tread' (ibid., p. 375). Thus after the turn to the self we now also have a recognition of the originality and diversity of the selves of different people.

After the Romantic period, Schopenhauer asserted that the self is not a source of the good but the locus of an insatiable, uncontrollable, egotistic will to exist and to acquire the resources for it. One should try to escape from the self and its will in a Buddhist like ascetic discipline. One can temporarily escape in art, in particular in music, as a contemplation of the universal, beyond the will-driven individuality of the self. By contrast, there is also a line of thought in literature (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Dostoyevsky) that wishes neither to deny nor to escape human passions, in an acceptance of darkness and even depravity as part of the existential force that is an expression of humanity and which can manifest itself in a raw beauty and which one can accept as human destiny. In philosophy we find this acceptance of humanity as it is, with all its passions – even a love of human fate (*'amor fati'*) – with Nietzsche.

Both Schopenhauer (2010 [1851]) and Nietzsche (2006 [1886]) emphasize the self-sufficiency of the self. They both make the distinction between pride, as the perception of self-worth based on one's own conviction, which they approve, and vanity, as the seeking of recognition of worth by others, which they despise and condemn. There is certainly something to be said against vanity, but pride is based on the assumption that the conviction of self-worth is valid and free from delusion, while both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche themselves exhibit such a delusion.

By this time we have strayed far from benevolence as part of a providential, God-given nature, as part of self-interest or human nature, and we arrive at a demasking of benevolence as hypocritical and suppressive of human flourishing. Such honesty about human nature cannot simply be brushed aside out of moral distaste. Nietzsche demands an answer, and later I will give it.

The movement towards the self has also taken another turn. The self no longer is the unitary, simple, undivided (as the word 'individual' suggests), integrated subject that is transparent to itself and controls itself, as a unit of sensibility and reason, but a fragmented, unfathomable self in continual flux. That insight goes back as far as Montaigne and Pascal, but it is further developed, partly instigated by the work of Nietzsche (with his notion of the self as a *dividuum* and not an *individuum*), in twentieth-century French philosophy (Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Irigaray, Glucksmann). Contemporary brain science and social psychology confirm ideas of a divided self, not transparent to itself, and not master of itself. And with the demasking of the self we find ourselves in a crisis of the humanism of the autonomous, rational and self-controlled individual.

According to Lasch (1991) mentality has shifted from devotion to work, as a contribution to both self-interest and the good of all, to devotion to

personal wealth and prosperity by achievement, and next devotion to status and the winning of competition with others as a goal in itself. This mentality yields a profiling of the self even without achievements, rhetoric above truth, opinions above arguments, glittering in public attention above grey, anonymous mediocrity. If one cannot achieve this by oneself, then one may do so in the reflection of the glitter of idols. This reflects a yearning for a heroism that has been lost in modernity. Our culture has regressed into narcissism. Narcissism is not a synonym for egotism, selfishness or an excess of self, nor for a manifestation of personality, but on the contrary for a lack of self, a collapse of personality, an experience of inner emptiness and senselessness. This latter must then be filled with delusions of greatness that must be mirrored and confirmed in the environment, or by images of heroes that one places on a pedestal and to whom one mirrors oneself. Lasch (1991, p. 37) speaks of a 'sense of heightened self-esteem only by attaching himself to strong, admired figures whose acceptance he craves and by whom he needs to feel supported'. The inner voice of nature turns out not to have much to say: there are no sources of authenticity present.

Lasch ascribes narcissism to the inability to learn to live with one's shortcomings and with the fact that others don't only exist to satisfy one's wants. This shortfall increases as one sets one's ambitions higher, beyond one's capabilities, regardless of the interests of others, to satisfy one's ambitions and longings. Advertising and other pressures to consume have contributed to this, with an appeal to longings and the suggestion of accessibility to nice cars, luxury furnishing, beauty, glitter, power and influence, the appearance and conduct of the 'jet set', self-realization, etc. Lasch even ascribes our obsession with technology to a narcissistic urge to lift the limitations on the satisfaction of our needs for longing and protection (*ibid.*, p. 244).

### **The stumbling of benevolence**

Let us consider how in the development of the self benevolence has fallen away and what the implications of this are. Can the individual transcend his or her egotism and narcissism by him or herself, or does he or she need the help of God? With Descartes the ethics of self-restraint has its basis in a feeling of dignity and esteem for the self, resembling warrior-aristocratic virtues (to which Nietzsche also felt attracted). According to Locke a rational notion of the naturally good entails that the individual take the interests of others to heart, who all form part of God's creation. Locke recognizes inborn inclinations to egocentricity in property, power and glory, but God's law, with a threat of punishment by damnation, corrects such inclinations.

The problem of course is that if we drop the idea of God and His creation, and the threat of damnation, why should people still take the interests of others to heart, if it is not for their own salvation? As indicated in economic analysis, the dictate of reason does include enlightened self-interest in

taking the interests of others to heart as long as there is a net advantage in it for the self, which often is not the case. Even if regard for others is part of optimal self-interest, optimal collective behaviour can be difficult to reach (as game-theoretic analyses of for example prisoner's dilemmas show). Even if bankers were converted to an ethic of societal interest, then they are still caught in the pressures of labour markets to pay excessive bonuses lest they no longer attract the best people and, due to pressure from capital markets, take excessive risks for the sake of sales and profit.

I think this is where Taylor finishes up: when we reflect on the development of the disconnected self then we end up again with the need for a God to go beyond ourselves in the interest of humanity. Taylor (2006, p. 146) distinguishes two ways in which the human being needs divine grace to supplement any natural goodness in a maintenance of self and other, the seeking of pleasure and the avoidance of pain:

- To transcend the natural good to a life of holiness and virtues of faith, hope and charity;
- To rise above original sin to even be able to see the natural good (what Taylor calls a 'hyper-Augustinian' view).

The deism of the Enlightenment first dropped the second need for the grace of God, in a denial of original sin, and then the first need, in the sufficiency of the natural good. In deism the good no longer lies in a personal relation with God but in gratitude and awe for His creation. There no longer is a God to pull us beyond our human affairs, only a God as guarantor of human happiness. Divine providence no longer lies in intervention by God in individual lives but in the order of the system that he created. What is good is no longer given in divine revelation but is read from the design of divine creation (ibid., p. 279).

A line that goes back to Erasmus resists a vision of religion in terms of command and control, with an external law, in favour of a vision that 'saw humans as intrinsically attuned to God' (ibid., p. 249) and human nature as inclined to the good (which goes back to Plato). This line continues in Hutcheson's theory of moral sentiments. According to this view self-interest and benevolence go together automatically. Self-love carries a moral impulse. What earlier was seen as passions that require control by reason are now moral sentiments that are part of reason.

Deism paved the way for a non-religious Enlightenment. If the good can be read from the design of nature, does it still matter that God created it? 'The dignity of free, rational control came to seem genuine only free of submission to God; the goodness of nature, and/or our unreserved immersion in it, seemed to require its independence, and a negation of any divine vocation' (ibid., p. 315). The question then is, certainly for Taylor, whether without God human dignity is strong enough to yield benevolence or

whether inner nature can destroy rather than build it. With Nietzsche inner nature is indeed a source of amoral, eruptive and disruptive energy, which he associated with Dionysus, the god of inebriation and ecstasy.

In the radical Enlightenment divine, providential order dropped out and the chief remaining ethic was based on the maximization of utility. The value of human flourishing in ordinary life became sufficient, removed from transcendent values that are either illusory or stunt human flourishing. The connection between self-oriented rationality and benevolence towards others that earlier was simply assumed now appears incredibly naive to us. Nietzsche revealed that ruthlessly and accepted that far from being part of self-interest benevolence is an obstacle to self-realization.

Rousseau still had an affinity with deism in his idea that the goodness of God is mirrored in nature, but to him there is no automatic benevolence in self-interest. In his thought there is a renewed tension between good and evil, the vision that evil comes from outside, from society, and that to arrive at the good we must turn inside – and for that rationality hinders rather than helps. This is what made him so influential, in the stimulus of a subjective view and the autonomous individual (*ibid.*, p. 361).

Kant also denied that benevolence is automatic, as part of self-interest, and recognized a gulf between good and evil; but rather than finding the good by searching our soul the good is to be found in a universal moral law that applies equally for all, under similar circumstances, which is chosen freely and rationally. Morality is part of rationality. Freedom requires that we rise above what is merely given in our nature, to choose to act rationally according to universal principles. This moral law is not given from outside but arises from the reasoning of the self. Dignity of the rational being itself commands obedience to the moral law. All this therefore is part of the dominant turn into the self. This thought has had great influence in attempts to arrive at universal justice and formed the basis, for example, for the declaration of universal human rights.

In the Romantic period exploration of our inner feelings is 'seen as conferring a heightened, more vibrant quality of life ... where our sensual fulfilments are experienced as having higher significance' (*ibid.*, p. 373). Then inner feelings can slip away from ethics and no longer guarantee benevolence. Ethics shifts to aesthetics. This eventually leads to Nietzsche's will to power as a passion for self-realization.

In the light of all these lines of development to a more or less disconnected, free, autonomous self, how can benevolence arise without help from God? Morality of justice and benevolence appears to have stumbled under the forces of elevation and a confirmation of the self. The idea that benevolence is part of a divine providential order of nature falls back on God, even if he does not directly intervene in our lives. But such an order is hardly credible in view of human atrocities and natural disasters. The idea that benevolence can be found within, in the true nature of the human

# PROOF

*The History of the Self* 77

being, as Rousseau claimed, did not seem credible unless that is again seen as part of a divine order, if we consider the monstrosities that are also part of human nature.

The idea that benevolence can be found in the form of rational, universal principles of a moral law, as Kant proposed, is credible only if, again, that is part of a divine order, or as long as it is part of rational self-interest. Can it stand up to egotism?

Nietzsche, finally, destroyed Rousseau's idea that benevolence is part of our true selves, in our inner nature, and claimed that the self is driven by a will to power that brings Dionysian ecstasy, a transcendence of the self where no point of departure or premise, cognitive or moral, is exempt from criticism, and which is thwarted by benevolence.

In present moral mentalities we still see here and there, criss-crossing, the heritage of different streams of thought, in different ways with different people: a benevolence out of an awe for nature; or from the conviction of a universal moral order; or from inner sources of feeling. Are they strong and vital enough not to be overrun by egotisms of hedonism, self-expression, delusions of national identity, religion and race, and zombie narcissism?

On this question I will argue two things. First, next to an instinct for survival, self-preservation and power, we have an instinct for a certain degree of altruism and benevolence, given not by God but by evolution. Second, the self needs the other human being to achieve the Nietzschean goal of self-transcendence, which requires benevolence. For that I derive inspiration from Levinas.

# 4

## Free Will?

In this chapter I discuss freedom in general and freedom of the will in particular, and the difference and relation between egotism and altruism. The issue of the existence or not of free will has a long history and is still alive. It is of central importance in discussions of ethics, morality, punishment, education and justice. What is benevolence without free will? If someone cannot choose his or her conduct, what is the basis for punishment? Can freedom be learned, in education, teaching and experience? If there is no free will, do we need God all the more, or does, the other way around, religion require free will?

### Good, evil and free will

In (Catholic) religion one must assume free will in order to allow the human being to opt for evil, lest God be given the blame for it. We can distinguish between evil that others or we act out (from greed, jealousy, will to power, conceit, penchant for violence, prejudice, etc.) and evil that happens to us without anyone's doing (accident, illness, natural disaster). Every religion in the sense of godservice is confronted with the problem of evil or the problem of the justice of God (theodicy). How can we reconcile evil, of both kinds, with the idea of God? If God causes or tolerates evil, he is not benevolent; if evil arises against his will, he is not all-powerful; and if he has no knowledge of it, he is not all-knowing. All three are in conflict with the notion of God. This issue had already been debated long before Christ, e.g. by Epicurus (341–270 BC).

Christianity has tried several solutions for this dilemma. Malebranche and Leibniz argued that God is a rational being and that it is in his nature to let the world run according to the simplest possible, universal laws of nature (Nadler 2008). That offers the greatest wealth of phenomena. Complex arrangements, with divine intervention by way of miracles, get in each other's way and leave less scope for forms of life. Inevitably, however, such simple and universal laws work out to the disadvantage of some people, including

the righteous. There may be possible other worlds with less evil and injustice, but they would have to be arranged according to less simple laws.

This resonates with the economists' ideology of markets. According to this, the market system is always good, yielding the best of all possible economies, and is to be left alone, including where it causes suffering and injustice, because intervention by the state (in the place of God) has adverse effects in constraining the scope for variety and richness of human endeavour.

Voltaire in his *Candide* ridiculed the idea that this world is the best of all possible worlds through the character of Dr Pangloss, and since then the idea that the actual is the best has been called 'Panglossian'. A turning point was the earthquake in Lisbon in 1755. Surely God cannot intend such arbitrary destruction and suffering? The suffering of small, innocent children in disasters is especially difficult to accept.

If God is not like a person, and personal human concepts such as rationality, reasons, will, intellect and justice do not apply to the Creator, as Descartes and Spinoza thought, then the problem of evil simply disappears. God does not do things because they are good; rather, they are good because God performs them.

Another reasoning is that God's creation was good but human beings have let themselves be seduced by the Devil (into plucking the apple from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad) and thereby aspired to lift themselves to the level of God. For that sin mankind was expelled from Paradise and punished forever with mortality, pain and deprivation in earthly existence. In that way also, evil that happens to us is ascribed to the evil that we do (or Adam and Eve did).

Original sin must have been an act of free will, albeit under the seduction of the devil, because if the human being had been brought to it by a force beyond its will, by external factors or internal factors of human nature, then God would again be accountable. The Devil, in his turn, must for comparable reasons have been created by God (because otherwise His power would again be limited) and to work his evil by free will. The story for this was that he was first an angel who also aspired to equal God and was punished for this by expulsion from Heaven. Out of spite about this, and out of envy of the creation of the human being in the image of God, the Devil wrought his evil. In origin both the human being and the Devil were good but they sacrificed that by free will. The denial of free will pulls the rug from under all of this. The carefully crafted story was therefore defended by sword and fire against all manner of heresy.

According to Catholicism, in contrast with Protestantism, God accords everyone sufficient grace to be saved by the performance of good deeds. That does not imply that good works will save everyone: everyone remains free to accept or reject the help of God. Protestantism, and within the Catholic church Jansenism, on the contrary, maintain that: not everyone is accorded grace; one cannot earn it by good deeds; salvation is given in

advance, in predestination; and if one has received it one cannot but do good. Here, freedom disappears and action is predetermined.

If one denies free will, so that the evil of the human being and the Devil is determined by external factors or internal nature, and both are created by God since everything is created by God, then one falls back on the position that God has created evil next to good.

### **The dualism of good and evil**

An alternative is to switch to so-called Manichaeism, a dualism of the Devil and God, in which the Devil created evil alongside the good created by God. The problem of reconciling evil in the world with a benevolent God, and the impulse from it towards a dualism of good and evil, has plagued the Christian church from the beginning, from the first centuries after Christ, in diverse streams of the so-called 'gnosis'.

A later variant of it was the faith of the Cathars in northern Italy and the south of France in the 11th to the 13th centuries. They put the goodness of God above his omnipotence: better a benevolent God who is not capable of preventing evil than an omnipotent God who also creates and permits evil. Cicero (106–43 BC) had already suggested the idea (Roquebert 2001, p. 387). According to the Cathars the material world with all its evil is created by the Devil, who, himself, was not created by God. However, in the human body there lies, incarcerated, in a prison of flesh, the spirit of an angel that will sooner or later return to the immaterial realm of the true, benevolent God. The dualism of good and evil translates itself into a dualism of soul and body. The Cathars denied free will but allowed for one single free choice: for the human being to allow him or herself to be led in life by the Devil or by God, the latter by force of the angel enclosed in us. God should have foreseen that choice, though he has no effect here because the human being was created by the Devil, not himself. God has sent Christ to earth, though not incarnated in a human body, and not with the purpose of redeeming human sin, but to let human beings know of the angelic souls they have in them and to show how they can live to have those souls reunited with the kingdom of God. In that sense the Cathars were true Christians, though the role of Christ was reduced to that of a messenger and spokesman of God.

The Cathars had to pay for their faith with their extermination – in two crusades and in persecution by the Inquisition. As well as fundamental theological reasons, there were also more worldly, political reasons. The appeal of the Cathar faith and the example of the sober life they set (involvement with Devil-created materiality was to be minimized), in contrast with the expansive, materialistic behaviour of worldly and Catholic spiritual leaders, formed a threat to the position of the church and the nobility. The Cathars also denied the holy sacristy, which undermined the foundation of the Catholic divine service.

Nevertheless, the Cathars are logically mostly right, in view of the problem of evil. If God is all-knowing now and always, then he knows what free will leads to with human beings and angels; and evil, thus, is wrought with his knowing and without his intervention. The rejoinder from Christian orthodoxy is that if human beings and angels, as creatures of God, have no free will, they can only do good (evil is not an option) – but this means that the *doing* of good carries no merit; yet God wants to be able to reward and punish, and for that he needs the human being to be able to do good and bad according to his or her own free will.

Neiman (2009, p. 429) suggests an argument that, after God had created the world, in all its glory, cruelty and arbitrariness, he created the human being to bring morality into the world. The answer of the Cathar, or comparable heretic, is that if God has that need then this also is at odds with the notion of an omnipotent God. If God has created angel and human being with free will to do evil, then he is cause of that evil according to an old principle of law that goes back to the civil law of the Roman emperor Justinian (483–565) that whoever gives occasion for evil is the cause of it (Roquebert 2001, p. 214). Such cannot lie in the nature of God and thus there must be a source of evil not created by God.

A second rejoinder from orthodoxy, e.g. by Thomas Aquinas, is that what counts as evil for one person is often counted as good by another. The prey is sacrificed for the predator. And if evil appears inscrutable and senseless there is an underlying intention of God for what ultimately is the good – there is divine providence where we do not see it.

A conclusion of this theological debate can be that logically speaking all accounts in one way or another detract from the idea of God as omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent. In orthodox doctrine God needs the human being to do good on the basis of free will; with the Cathar the creation of an evil world is beyond the grasp of God.

One can also conclude that belief in God and rational, logical analysis are irreconcilable. This was also the standpoint of Pierre Bayle, in opposition to Malebranche, Leibniz, Locke, Newton and others who argued for the possibility of godservice resting on reason (Nadler 2008; Israel 2008). However, the idea that God is beyond human reason goes back also to Descartes, who held that we must not think of God in terms of human categories, to the Greek orthodox line of Christian faith, and to a long line of mysticism within all monotheistic religions (Armstrong 1993).

One can conclude that rational belief in God in any form is absurd. The introduction into theology of logical analysis, with the aid of Aristotelian logic, with some delay, through Moorish Spain, has turned out to be the introduction of a Trojan Horse from which the demolition of faith began. God is either logically impossible, in view of the theodicy problem, or he is inscrutable; and in either case he cannot be reconciled with the spirit of the radical Enlightenment. It is unwise for the faithful to be tempted into logical

arguments for the belief in God because logically it does not add up. One can surrender to mystical, speechless awe and faith, but without logic what are the arguments for orthodoxy over heresy, or the other way around? There is no basis for denouncing and convicting heretics – which is all for the good.

The relevance of this point for this book is that Levinas extrapolated the idea of an inscrutable God and made it into the inscrutability of the other human being. One should never pretend to be able to grasp, understand and explain the other fully. That is not only ethically wrong but also unwise for yourself because the indispensability of the other precisely lies in his or her inscrutability. Pascal's argument for an inscrutable God (*deus absconditus*) is that if you could grasp God you would no longer need him. That argument now applies to the other human being (*alter absconditus*). I don't think Levinas ever put it this way but I think it fits his thinking.

Lasch (1991) explained the dualism of gnosis and the Cathars as an expression of narcissism. The attribution of all imperfections of creation to the Devil and the attribution of salvation and boundless good and bliss to the divine is evidence of a narcissistic denial and rejection of all limitation of the self and its environment, in an urge to perfection, protection and bliss, and the clinging to an idealized parent with whom one is reunited. Lasch interprets the more orthodox view of God as the imposition of the acceptance of the limitations of self and environment in the satisfaction of our desires, as a blockade of narcissism. Therefore, he claims, the erosion of godservice has strongly contributed to the ascendance of narcissism.

Another conceivable way out for godservice is to postulate a hereafter where the good or innocent are rewarded and the bad are punished. Then one can acknowledge that an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God allows for evil in the world but compensates the suffering of the innocent with eternal life in heaven. That leaves the question as to why one should first allow the innocent to be punished in order to compensate them later; the answer to which is that in their suffering they are tested in the strength of their faith. Reward in heaven and punishment in hell require immortality of the personal soul, which in turn requires that it be not bound to the perishable body. This could then, equally with the gnosis, be the expression of a narcissistic escape from the limitations of the earthly body and its existence in the world. Where on the one hand the idea of God makes us aware of our limitations and thereby limits narcissism, on the other hand it makes an appeal to narcissism in the delusion of a hereafter.

After the 'death of God' we now require a new brake on narcissism, and in this book I follow the philosophy of the other of Levinas, where the other fulfils that purpose, but without a narcissistic hereafter or salvation for the self.

Spinoza denied immortality of the soul, and that greatly contributed to his excommunication from the Jewish community in Amsterdam. Spinoza also denied free will. As noted earlier, with Spinoza the notion of God concerned what we would now call the system of nature based on laws of

nature. This yields a determinism of conduct where there is no scope for free will. The human being can only stoically accept his or her dependencies and mortality and console him or herself in knowledge as intellectual love of God as the system of nature.

What is at stake in ethics is that if there is no free will it is not clear what the basis for morality can be. At the end of the nineteenth century Nietzsche denied free will in connection with his lampoon of Christian morality. That morality requires free will to enable threats of hell and damnation and promise of salvation, and it is used to keep the human being in fetters, in suppression of the creative impulses ('will to power'). Nietzsche asserted (in his *Genealogy of Morality*) that free will is a myth that arose from resentment of the weak against the strong. For protection of the weak it must be possible for the strong to restrain themselves in their will to power. Then if they exploit their strength the weak can accuse them of not exercising self-restraint. And the weak can give an excuse for their weakness, claimed to be not a lack of ability or daring but a self-restraint for the sake of morality. In fact, according to Nietzsche, the human being is driven by bodily powers, feelings and a blind will to power, the suppression of which is a denial of life. The purely good does not achieve creation. Here also, as with the Cathars, a purely good God could not have created the world. According to Nietzsche creation brings suffering with it, of self and other, in 'creative destruction'. I derive this term from the economist Schumpeter, who was inspired by Nietzsche in his view of an elite of entrepreneurs that produce creative destruction. Avoidance of suffering entails avoidance of creation. Perhaps this gives a new argument for a benevolent God who allows for evil: without suffering there can be no creation. But this idea is in need of further elaboration: in what sense is evil needed, and why, and how does creation then work? However, I will not pursue that point here.

However that may be, the question remains: if people are driven by impulses they cannot restrain, how can they be held responsible? And isn't punishment just pure revenge without moral or educational basis or purpose? The spectre arises of irrationality, egotism, irresponsibility, immorality, egotism and the disappearance of the moral grounds for punishment. For this reason some respond to the demise of free will with the plea to maintain it as a useful fiction. But surely such deliberate self-delusion is not satisfactory? Is there really no free will? I will argue later that indeed we do not have control of our will, but that does not mean that we have no influence on it.

## Forms of freedom

First, before turning to free will, let us consider freedom more generally. One idea is the distinction between 'negative' or 'passive' freedom, as 'freedom from' restraint, and 'positive' or 'active' freedom', as 'freedom to' pursue goals. Freedom from restraint refers, most of all, to absence of restraint from

outside, in laws and regulations, coercion, intimidation and manipulation. For the sake of similar freedom for others one should accept some limitation of one's own passive freedom, in the form of laws and regulations. One has no right to usurp the room for action that thereby limits the room for others. Those freedoms are associated with human rights, justice and democracy. However, exercise of power is pervasive and inevitable, and can also be positive, in giving positive freedom in the form of new options for action. I will discuss this in Chapter 10.

As Rousseau had already recognized, in organizations, committees and other forms of association one will often voluntarily limit one's own action space in order not to be cast out from the group. Here lies the danger of 'group think': of a lock-in into the thinking and doing of the group. Conversely, voluntary self-imposition of restraint can go too far in the form of cowardly subjugation.

Positive 'freedom to' entails that one has the resources to exercise choice and pursue goals, with access to the necessary economic, social and political resources, knowledge and insight, voice and attention. As argued by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (2006) this entails a wider notion of justice.

Note that unlimited choice is not necessarily desirable. One can also be flooded by options for choice, which can make the choice difficult or bothersome. When in the Netherlands health insurance was liberalized, economists, who recommended the step, expected people to scrutinize the conditions and switch between competing insurers – yet few people did.

One can speak of 'freedom from' more widely, in freedom from established customs, norms and values, received wisdom, certainty, and even freedom from enclosure in the self. Some, however, may consider freedom from certainty rather odd and would prefer freedom from uncertainty.

Hannah Arendt (1958) made a distinction between 'work' and 'action', in specific meanings that differ from their ordinary meanings.<sup>1</sup> In 'work' one produces a product on the basis of a prior model, exemplar, paradigm, design, prescription or the like. The goal is clear; one knows where one is going. In 'action' there is a new beginning; one does not know where one is going. Arendt recalled the distinction, in classical Greek, between *archein* (beginning) and *prattein* (implementing). In the innovation literature there is a distinction between 'exploitation', efficiently utilizing existing resources, and 'exploration', the creation of novelty, which I think is close, if not identical, to the distinction between work and action.

Outcomes of action/exploration are unpredictable and irreversible. Arendt associates action with unique people engaging in original activity. Work requires coherence and limits to individual variety and idiosyncrasy; action requires diversity and room for initiative and the courage for dealing with uncertainty. This exactly applies also to the distinction between exploitation and exploration. This is also similar to the distinction, in economics,

between on the one hand production/management and on the other hand innovation/entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is, more than management, a matter of 'bricolage', as Lévi-Strauss (1962) called it, or of 'muddling through', where at the outset one has only a vague idea of the direction in which one is going but which may change later on the occasion of problems and opportunities that arise along the way.

This is very congenial to the pragmatic perspective of knowledge and action that I endorse and employ. I am interested in action, in the sense discussed here, because it is, I think, the basis for the 'flourishing of life' that I am interested in.

There is a fundamental contradiction in prior planning and programming of innovation, which plays a role in debates on innovation policy that I have been involved in. There is an inveterate inclination in policy-making to treat action (innovation) as work (production) and to proceed as if innovation can be programmed and designed according to blueprints. In Arendt's terms: there is the urge to reduce action to work.

The unpredictability of action is due, in particular, to the fact that it is a phenomenon of interaction between diverse people, which yields reactions to actions that open up new insights, preferences, obstacles, opportunities and goals. This yields an uncertainty, even about one's own future motives and goals, that is peculiar to society and absent in nature. It might be called 'strategic uncertainty'.

As Arendt points out, there is an ambivalent relation to freedom. 'Action' is an expression of freedom to initiate new beginnings, but its unpredictability limits freedom in two ways. First, the mutual interaction between people that arises in action constrains freedom in the sense that one needs to constrain oneself to leave freedom for others. Second, according to Arendt the unpredictability and irreversibility of outcomes blocks autonomy, or sovereignty as Arendt calls it, i.e. being master of one's circumstances and future. Not being able to predict what will happen and what others will do, and how that will interact with what one does, means that one cannot control one's future.

The imposition of rules, the eliminating of uncertainty, fits work/exploitation but stifles action/exploration, which requires the 'freedom of' uncertainty, not 'freedom from' it. However, in action 'freedom of' uncertainty goes together with dependence on the actions of others, which limits freedom in the sense of autonomy, and reduces freedom from constraint. As Arendt also points out, the uncertainty of action can be reduced by promises and, I would add, by more or less formal agreements and contracts. However, for action contracts can and should never be complete, closed or eliminating uncertainty, because that would again reduce action to work. Therefore, promises, agreements and contracts may be broken, not just out of opportunism or lack of loyalty but by necessity of unforeseen conditions. Thus, Arendt also argues, we need forgiveness. Here we open up a whole discourse

on loyalty, trust, self-interest and altruism. I will discuss self-interest and altruism later in the present chapter, and I will discuss trust in detail in Chapter 9.

Now in my view autonomy, as defined by Arendt, is in any case an illusion, and the unpredictability of action/exploration is precisely a perspective for the highest degree of freedom, in order to arrive, on the basis of surprises in what happens and what others do, at new insights into what one wants. Breaking the autonomy of the self can yield new paths, and that yields freedom *from* the self, as I will argue below.

While *action* (beginning, *exploration*) and *work* (implementing, *exploitation*) can be conceptually distinguished, they go together, or follow upon each other. Management follows entrepreneurship. Exploration is followed by exploitation. But how do new beginnings arise? Where does exploration come from? Later, in the discussion of a 'cycle of discovery' in Chapter 5, I will argue how discovery may arise from practice, exploration from exploitation, and action from work.

### Freedom of the will?

The core question concerning free will is whether, and to what degree, or in what sense, our decisions and deeds are 'up to ourselves'. In the debate on free will (see e.g. Kane 2005) one question concerns the problems and possibilities of determinism. Determinism implies 'equal antecedents, equal outcomes'. Given all that has happened so far, what happens next cannot be other than as it is. If one denies that, one then has to question what one understands by 'causality'. One tradition is that of the 'incompatibilists' who believe that under determinism there can be no free will, so that free will requires an escape from determinism. Such escape is possible according to philosophical 'libertarians'.<sup>2</sup> This usually means that there is a self over and above physical bodily causes that commands deeds, and in some way is its own cause, an unmoved mover, like God. What does that mean? That depends on the definition of 'causality'. Here I will not go into that, another big issue, because it would require too much space and effort on the part of author and reader, and because it is less relevant. I did discuss multiple levels of causation in Chapter 2, as part of an argument against reductionism. The relevant question here is, in my view, the following: if we accept that choices and deeds are caused, to what extent are they 'up to us'? Can we exert conscious control over them? Can we influence them, somehow? And the key question then is: to what extent do the causes take the form of conscious thought, or how can conscious thought influence them? Another view is that of 'compatibilism': the fact that action is determined by character and reasons is itself a manifestation of free will.

Another way to frame the issue is by the following question: given character and circumstances, could someone have acted differently from what

he or she did? Voltaire made the useful distinction between freedom of action and freedom of will. One has freedom of action if one can follow one's will. Freedom of will is impossible according to Voltaire because to him that would mean that action is undetermined. He was, in other words, a determinist and incompatibilist: the fact that action is determined by causes implies that there is no free will. According to Schopenhauer (in his *World as Will and Representation*) the will itself is free and autonomous, but we have no control over it. It is part of character and that is something we cannot change. We are predestined by it.

If character and will determine action, then the question is what the causes of character and will are, and in what degree and in what way character and will can change to do things differently next time. By 'character' I mean a repertoire of dispositions that one has accumulated in life, from genetic endowment in interaction with one's natural and social environment. Here arises the pragmatic perspective that I employ in this book, as elaborated in Chapter 5.

We have no freedom in the sense that we cannot just step out of the cognition and dispositions we have developed, but cognition and disposition can be more or less reflective, in the assessment of what we are going to do and in the outcomes of what we have done. We can have dispositions to consider our dispositions and choose paths along which they might develop in another direction. An alcoholic cannot step out of his addiction but can choose to follow a rehabilitation programme or join AA. In that way we have freedom in some sense. That depends among other things on the extent to which we have developed in an environment in which cognitive reflection are possible and are stimulated as we develop inclinations to actions. All this requires closer scrutiny.

### Cognition

How does this work cognitively? I am convinced by modern brain science and social psychology that, as already intuited by Spinoza, the overwhelming majority of our choices and decisions are determined by unconscious processes, and often our reasons for actions are rationalizations post hoc rather than causes of our actions. Our largely unconscious categories of cognition and dispositions to action develop in interaction between on the one hand the genetic heritage from our evolution and ancestry and on the other hand our experience in the world along our life paths. Elaborated a bit further: if our cognitive structures arise in a mental evolutionary process – in a 'mental Darwinism', as the cognitive scientist Gerald Edelman (1987) proposed (see pp. 000–000), in which those mental structures survive and get reinforced that have the greatest success, contribute most to what we think or feel that we want – then we might influence that evolutionary process, e.g. by changing the selection environment in which development takes place.

A crucial point in the debate on free will is that it and the causal effects from conscious thought on actions are not the same. Here, I believe, lies the crux of the debate on free will. Both conscious thought and unconscious impulse affect our actions. The famous experiments by Libet (1985) that did much to trigger the debate indicated that actions precede conscious decisions, and this was taken as proof of the absence of free will, but the experiment does not logically prove that conscious thought has no causal effect (Baumeister and Masicampo 2011). The unconscious trigger of action may have previously been affected or even determined by conscious thought, and conscious thought after the trigger to act can still have an effect on its execution, and it can affect future unconscious triggers of action. We do not have full conscious control over our decisions and actions, but conscious thought does influence them. There is a mutual influence between conscious and unconscious thought.

There is ample experimental evidence for the effects of conscious thought, as shown in a survey by Baumeister and Masicampo (2011). While many actions are triggered and executed unconsciously, their choice, direction and performance are affected by conscious preparation in mentally simulating the action, in anticipation of possible regret based on reflection on past effects. I give one example. A conscious decision to take the perspective of an opponent in negotiation improves negotiation results, even though the process of taking the other's perspective and the production of action from it are largely unconscious. While conscious thought affects action indirectly, by affecting what unconscious processes are called into play, unconscious triggering and execution must play a large role. Just imagine how bothersome or even infeasible it would be if we had to control consciously the operation and coordination of all our muscles, release of adrenalin, breathing, etc. Also, the automatic response from routine or emotion serves to offer a fast response where conscious reflection would be too slow.

The effect of conscious thought depends on whether it concerns a task of logical analysis, story telling, execution of a skill or making a choice. For execution of a skill it makes a difference whether the person is a novice (conscious thought helps) or an experienced practitioner (conscious thought hinders). That accords with the idea that after much practice a skill becomes tacit. If routinized behaviours were not relegated to the unconscious, our functioning would be impossible. But malfunction can wake us from unconscious routine and propel us into conscious evaluation, and without that we could not function or survive. It appears that conscious learning of a skill and routinized execution occur in different parts of the brain (ibid. 2010, p. 31).

We analyse the pros and cons of a decision rationally, explore scenarios of what might happen if ..., discuss it with others, and then leave it up to 'intuition' to process this into a decision. Even Dijksterhuis (2009), who favours the unconscious side of cognition and action, granted that in choosing a house to buy, for example, we look into the rational pros and

cons of location, price, state of maintenance, satisfaction of desires we know we have, and then we leave that to gestate for a while, 'sleep on it', and then we decide on the basis of 'how it feels'. While the rational preliminaries do not decide the issue, they are not without effect.

While conscious thought can trigger, direct, feed and connect unconscious processes of choice and decision, it can also go the other way around. I am writing this book from an unreasoned urge to create and craft a text, from vanity, to gain recognition, and I have a partly unconscious agenda, perhaps to prove that trust can work and thereby legitimize my earlier work on trust – but execution requires a lot of conscious thought to get arguments right.

Baumeister and Masicampo (2010) argue that while conscious thought has some effect on decisions and choices, as discussed above, its main function is social and cultural, in the use of language in communication. Unconscious thought can hardly be expressed, and conscious thought is needed to handle strings of words in sentences, or strings of logical argument or causal effects. Language allows for a complexity of expression needed for social interaction, and, conversely, social interaction greatly increases the complexity of life, requiring language and hence conscious thought to deal with it. In other words, in the evolution of humanity conscious thought, language and social activity co-evolved (I will return to this in Chapter 6). We use conscious thought and language to simulate possible actions prior to taking them, as a function of conditions, possible response from others and ultimate results, using our remembered experience of earlier, similar actions.

Conscious simulation of what might happen as a result of alternative actions prior to action is especially important in view of the complexities and risks of social interaction. Who plays what role? How would different people react to some action? What would that mean for you? What would you do next? Who else would be involved? The serialization of steps in a narrative, for which we need conscious thought, has a function of connecting diverse locations and functions in the brain, thereby also mobilizing unconscious, emotively triggered feelings that are relevant to the activity involved. Awareness of risk of punishment of the type that one can expect, in view of the knowledge one has of similar trespasses of others, triggers images and fears that affect action. In other words, conscious thought not only triggers and feeds unconscious processes that initiate and execute action, but it also serves to gather and connect relevant unconscious processes.

Simulation is also needed for empathy: what would you do if you stood in the shoes of the other person. Also needed, for social legitimation, is the ability to give an account of one's actions in terms of motives and conditions. This is generally not an accurate account of true motives, which are often too unconscious to be known and told or when conscious may be uncomfortable to tell. Rather, people tap from a 'stockpile' of culturally

accepted explanations, which serves the purpose of social legitimation (ibid., p. 32).

By the way, this explains why it can be difficult to assimilate to a foreign culture or to collaborate with a cognitively distant other. Not only may one have inappropriate unconscious triggers of action, difficult to change or even be aware of since they are unconscious, but one may also lack the cognitive resources for an adequate simulation of acts, an understanding of the acts of others and an explanation of one's own acts (tapping from the wrong 'stockpile' of socially accepted explanations).

In Chapter 5 I will discuss some of the more detailed decision heuristics that social psychology tells us about. There we will see that decision procedures that are substantively non-rational or even irrational are adaptively useful and effective, and entail mixtures of conscious and unconscious thought.

To the role of the conscious in the *preparation* and *execution* of choice I now add that after decisions are made the emotional impact of outcomes and conscious reflection on them affects future unconscious triggers of action. In terms of Edelman's *neural darwinism*, these affect the selection environment of our impulses and inclinations by contributing to a sense of their success or failure that then strengthens or weakens these impulses as they compete amongst themselves. This does not change the decisions made but affects the development of inclinations that drive future decisions. While we cannot fully control our will, we and our social and institutional environment can affect its development. This also is only partly rational, since in the phenomenon of 'cognitive dissonance' we tend to be unconsciously selective in our perceptions of outcomes, ignoring negative evidence and seeking confirmation in positive evidence. We do not like to admit bad choices. Nevertheless, no matter how imperfectly, conscious evaluation does contribute to the sense of success or failure that affects the evolution of dispositions.

### Levels of freedom

From the literature on free will I distil four levels of freedom. Kane (2005) identified five levels, but in my opinion four suffice. The first level is freedom to act, freedom to follow the will, i.e. freedom 'from' restraint, whether that will itself is free or not, in pleasure seeking, self-realization, expression, discrimination, dominance, etc.

The freedom of following one's will can, however, mean that one is a slave to one's passions, impulses, instincts, addictions, prejudices, etc. This leads to a second level of freedom: of self-reflection and self-restraint. Here one has the freedom to ask what one wants at the first level of longings and impulses, and whether it is in line with a higher level of life values and convictions of good and bad. Here the question is not 'what do I want?' but 'what would I like to want?'

However, freedom of self-reflection and self-restraint is not as self-evident as it may seem, and as it appeared to philosophers of the Enlightenment. Here we run into the finding, discussed before, that so much of our doing is determined by our unconscious. Note that self-reflection alone does not yet yield self-control. One may want to want something else without being able to do so. An addict is fully aware that he or she does not want his or her addiction but is not capable of renouncing it. Self-reflection may be triggered by punishment or moral censure. Self-restraint may take the form of reducing one's freedom from restraint by submitting to external constraint, such as rehabilitation for the addict. Self-restraint in the form of a solitary act of will to control the will, or to overcome weakness of the will, is limited but not hopeless. As indicated earlier, experimental evidence shows that prior mental simulation of an action, anticipation of regret and reflection on past experience do affect the triggers and the execution of actions, even though they do not fully control them.

Freedom at this level of self-reflection and self-restraint does not imply that it is good what one wants to want. One can have the conviction that some bad behaviour is good, and one can have the self-discipline to do bad things, e.g. in a violent ideology for the sake of which one denies oneself comfort and pleasure or even proceeds to suicide bombing. Self-control can also be counter-productive when, as so often happens (and this is part of the pragmatist perspective), goals shift as one acts according to them, depending on obstacles and new opportunities that one finds along the way, in the 'muddling through' of much of our action. That freedom for change is eliminated if in mechanisms of control goals are imposed as fixed and unchangeable.

The third level of freedom (ascribed for example to Susan Wolf 1990) is the freedom of self-perfection through a change of what we want to want by adoption of norms of good and bad and rules of responsibility. The question then is, of course, where those come from. An important source of norms is the Christian morality of self-denial, altruism and sacrifice for the weak, which Nietzsche unmasked as hypocritical, a false self-sacrifice that masks a will to power and suppresses the forces of life and creativity.

A fourth level is the freedom for forming the self, in a re-evaluation of higher values and convictions of good and bad. That level seems libertarian, in a denial of determinism. Susan Wolf gives the following counter-example against this kind of freedom. The son ('JoJo') of a dictator ('Jo') has grown up, been educated, trained and indoctrinated to believe sincerely that the horrors perpetrated in the land of Jo are in fact good, so that he will perpetuate them in full conviction when he succeeds Jo.

Many think that we cannot have this level of freedom for the formation of the self because we are all the result of genetic factors plus the course of life. To think we do have this freedom is like the Baron of Munchausen who pulled himself from a swamp by his own hair. If we are only really free when we have this highest level of freedom, then this is an illusion. That is

the position of determinists. Even then, though, the lower levels may still exist – and that is not nothing. The question remains as to how far one can reach the highest level, the freedom of self-formation.

Freedom of self-control and of forming the self, as a voluntary and solitary act of will, at any moment, is limited, but we can submit to conditions and processes of moral debate, censure and punishment that by processes of mental Darwinism affect the development of the will, including its underlying subconscious processes, so that the future state of our will will be different, though the precise outcome cannot be known in advance. Note that the argument leads to a revised argument for responsibility and punishment. They have a limited effect on the present will but their rationale is most of all to affect the future will, by affecting its development.

### Freedom from others

In this book I argue that for there to be any chance of a freedom of self-formation one needs others who on the basis of a different genetic endowment and a different course of life view things differently and from there yield opposition to the views and convictions rooted in us. This brings me to Levinas. This decentration of the self goes against the idea of the autonomous individual that plays a central role in humanism. It also goes against Nietzsche's point of departure of the will to power of the individual as the dominant drive of the human being.

In his 'middle period' (in *Human, All too Human*) Nietzsche more or less clearly denied free will, but later (in the *Genealogy of Morality* and *Beyond Good and Evil*) he made room for the autonomous individual who freely develops his own path. There need not be inconsistency here. Individuals can wrest themselves free from social constraints, in freedom at the first level, while they are moved by feelings and impulses over which they have little conscious control, in lack of freedom at higher levels. It does not seem able, for example, to free itself from the fundamental will to power that Nietzsche postulates. People may develop a character by which they seek their own path, and be free in not conforming to their environment, yet, while they have that character, they cannot do otherwise. Being open to the other is the only chance one has to get away from conviction and character, and thereby to have any chance of the highest level of freedom. Note the paradox. We need to limit our freedom of self-orientation and self-expression, in opening up to the other, in order to gain freedom of self-development. Freedom from the self is needed for freedom of the self.

That yields, I propose, one argument for Levinas's plea for a submission to the other, for a feeling responsible for the well-being of the other, from an ethical imperative that is not a matter of rational evaluation and choice but which precedes these. That must be so, because otherwise it would be subjected to the a priori judgement of the self from which the self precisely

wants to escape. There we arrive again at the paradoxical result that the limitation of freedom in submission to the other offers the only chance for access to the highest level of freedom, in the formation of the self. According to Levinas (1987, p. 60) 'the presence of the other does not block freedom but implements it'. This is in tune with Simone de Beauvoir's (1995, p. 60) saying: 'moving oneself ahead by the freedom of others' (my translation).

According to Levinas the opening to the other, the surrender, the taking of responsibility for the other, is not something demanded and imposed by the other, but elicited by his 'visage', an emanation of his or her humanity. It arises from something in us and precedes relations, a feeling of embarrassment, of bad conscience, of scruple (literally a sharp pebble in our shoe (Guwy 2008, p. 93)), when we surrender to our natural drive towards self-interest and survival. We do not choose that feeling of embarrassment, it happens to us, but we can decide to ignore it. The ethical choice to follow that feeling, and to open ourselves to the other without intent to use the other or to encompass him or her, in what Levinas called 'passiveness', gives us, though we did not intend it for that, access to a higher form of freedom to submit our opinions, views and prejudgements to the views and criticism of the other, in his or her opposition. That, at least, is my rendering of Levinas. I am not sure he would agree. I suspect that he would find it too instrumental, too much oriented towards the freedom of the self.

It may seem paradoxical that we constrain our drive to self-interest, and in that sense limit our freedom, in order to open ourselves to the other and thereby gain access to a source of change that liberates us from ourselves. A limitation of freedom at a lower level yields access to freedom at a higher level. This is related to the meaning of the other for an escape from narcissism, by facing and accepting the limitations of our environment and ourselves and the revelation of self-delusion.

This argument resembles Hegel's analysis of the relation between master and slave. The master can afford to impose his will, but thereby misses the opportunity to grasp his own identity and to arrive at self-consciousness, for which one needs to watch oneself from the perspective of another. That is what Nietzsche failed to see.

The discussion also touches upon the issue of ideals and ideology, discussed in Chapter 2, triggered by the work of Neiman (2009). From ignorance and from unconscious motives and ideas every execution of ideals runs the risk of being contaminated by them and aborting as ideology. This is not a reason to give up ideals but to let others oppose them, thereby to arrive at better ideals or an execution of them.

### **Self-interest and altruism**

The issue of free will clearly touches upon issues of self-interest and altruism. Is altruism good, needed, possible? There is much confusion about this that

requires elucidation. It is useful to distinguish between myopic self-interest, or egotism, in which one does not consider the interests of others, and enlightened self-interest in which one does consider the interests of others as long as that does not go against self-interest. The interests of others and of the self can coincide and reinforce each other. An example is the investing in the knowledge or competence of a partner, which is in the interest of both the partner and oneself. Another example is the building of a good reputation by doing justice to others by which one creates opportunities for fruitful relations with others in the future. This can be a matter of self-interest, with a net advantage to the self after adding and subtracting profits and losses, including losses due to the sacrifice made in the interest of others. In this light myopic self-interest or egotism is often self-destructive: one can harm one's own interests.

Altruism goes further than enlightened self-interest. There one is inclined or prepared to accept a net loss for the sake of others. In limited altruism one is prepared to accept a lesser increase of self-interest, but not a reduction of it. The question is where the boundaries of altruism lie. Altruism rarely goes so far as to lead to self-destruction. That is only for the holy.

Economists usually reject altruism. Sometimes they do it by turning it into a caricature of self-denial, self-sacrifice or self-destruction, as if altruism is altruism only when it is boundless. A more reasonable economic argument against any sacrifice of self-interest is that the pressure towards survival under competition in markets demands that one take any opportunity and give nothing away without getting more in return. However, pressure of survival often is not that sharp. Frequently competition is sufficiently limited to allow some room for sacrifice. It is more challenging and more profitable to compete on the differentiation of products, which reduces pressure on price. Yet the argument carries some strength: as conditions get harsher, in the economy or a firm, one can afford fewer sacrifices and there will be less altruism.

A second argument from economists is that firms have a duty to shareholders to maximize profit or wealth and that any compromise on profit is unethical. However, one also compromises on profit where that would entail criminality or corruption, ill health or danger for workers, or, increasingly, pollution. The question then is whether one does that only from legal coercion or also from conviction. In the latter case it entails altruism. If firms no longer act from any conviction of the common good or responsibility then this is objectionable. Business is legitimated by satisfying needs in society, and these go beyond the mere demands of shareholders.

Altruism is often shrugged off with the claim that if one makes sacrifices for others this is because it gives moral satisfaction and hence it is a matter of self-interest after all. There are two arguments against this. First, it may indeed be that one engages in apparently altruistic acts from an urge towards recognition, moral satisfaction and feelings of compassion or happiness in

the happiness of others – then one does indeed speak of ‘pseudo-altruism’ (Powell 2010). But so what? The fact remains that one sacrifices some material good or pleasure for a moral good or higher pleasure of benevolence. This makes no difference only if one rejects any hierarchy of pleasure or good, if altruism is as pleasurable and good as gluttony or a sex craze. Furthermore, people may engage in altruistic acts without much or even any regard to self-interest or pleasure. One may act altruistically because either one finds that is what one should do, even when one dislikes it, or one acts out of an automatic response, not as a moral duty imposed from outside, but from a reflex of conscience. This is another side of the lack of freedom of the will. Our unconscious will can be an impulse to do good, unguided by calculative self-interest.

A second, more technical, argument is that if one adds moral satisfaction to the list of all sources of satisfaction the list becomes so long and heterogeneous – with sensual pleasure, absence of pain, wealth, security, intellectual and spiritual pleasure, freedom or autonomy, status, reputation, relaxation, equanimity, security, excitement, adventure, happiness with the happiness of others, moral satisfaction, enjoyment of benevolence, etc. – that it is no longer self-evident that all these dimensions of ‘utility’ are commensurable and can be fitted into a single ‘utility function’. If they do lead to clear preferences they may not satisfy the usual axioms such as that of transitivity that is generally seen as a logical necessity.<sup>3</sup> Then the notion of rational choice may collapse.

Deeds that are in the interest of others and of the self at the same time can arise from enlightened self-interest or altruism. How do we know the difference? The difference lies in underlying motivation (ibid.). Sometimes one does not know it even of oneself, due to the important role of the unconscious in our decision-making. The philosopher Kant had already recognized this. Neiman (2009, p. 341) argues that therefore we never have the right to call people bad. Here she goes too far in claiming (pp. 343–44) that intentions are irrelevant and that only deeds matter. I disagree. If intentions don’t matter, why bother to educate children? If a child errs, won’t you try to find out why? In fact we judge people on their intentions all the time, and rightly so. We try to fathom out whether people do bad things from accident, lack of competence, lack of attention or commitment, or bad intent. That matters greatly for how we respond to them, perhaps not so much for moral judgement as simply and pragmatically as a guideline for response and future action. In legal procedure it is a fundamental principle to find out whether something, say a killing, happened with intent and premeditation, by accident or impulse, forced by circumstance, as defence, or in a wave of delusion. Our sense of justice requires that. In ordinary life when something goes awry wise people ask perpetrators to explain what happened before jumping to the conclusion of bad intent. Good intentions do not make bad acts right, but punishment or other responses do depend

on it. If punishment, but also reward, does not rhyme with conditions and intentions they are considered unfair. Above all, disregard of intentions has adverse effects on future intentions as causes of conduct. If intentions do not matter one will not try to improve them.

Elsewhere in her book Neiman (2009, p. 378) regrets that shame and guilt disappear and that this is evidence of evil in the world. But what else are shame and guilt than the feeling that you did wrong with bad intentions and that this is morally or socially unacceptable. If one did something bad by accident or with good intentions you feel less shame. I do accept that it is possible, though not normal, not to feel guilt while one is conscious of breaking one's own moral norms, or to feel guilt while one is not conscious of such failure (Joas 2007, p. 61). Feelings of guilt, or lack of them, can delve deeper in the unconscious than conscious moral norms. However, the fact that motives cannot always easily be traced or put up for discussion is no reason not to try and trace and discuss them. Even if the effort to trace motives does not yield a secure conclusion, the activity of trying will have an affect, affecting also unconscious motives and drives, by virtue of the evolutionary cognitive process that I indicated before. This has an effect on future conduct even if it is not conscious.

The claim from Neiman that intentions do not matter contributes to the disappearance of guilt and shame that she deplors. The fact that intentions are often difficult to read off from conduct makes the attempt not less but more important. That is why criticism and discussion with others is needed to try and discover one's own intentions and to triangulate them with those of others. Of course the issue is not only to experience shame and guilt where that is justified but also to prevent it where it is not. Justified shame is educational, provided it does not entail a feeling of being irreparably evil, though false shame can be psychologically destructive (Nussbaum 2001).

In short, it is right that people are judged on what they do, not on what they think, but when they err they are also judged on their intentions. Indeed, we can judge people to be reliable or unreliable without thereby also calling them evil. Earlier I argued that free will is limited but nevertheless there, in some greater or lesser degree, at different levels. Were we forced to do wrong? Did we subject our actions to our moral norms? Were we able and willing to revise our moral norms? Intentions and motivation are crucial.

Neiman (2009, p. 435) uses the example of Iraq. It does not matter, she claims, whether the invasion occurred out of idealism (spreading freedom, democracy or peace) or something else (protecting oil interests, rationalization of high government spending, distraction tactics, macho instincts). But for different motives, different debates apply, with diverging consequences for further action, and for the motivation and justification of future interventions.

Yet, and I concede this point to Neiman, the fact that intentions underlying actions are hard to detect does constitute a problem. However, that is

not a reason to give up but to try harder. All the time, people try to infer intentions behind actions, where actions serve as 'relational signals' of intentions. We may have an instinct for doing this, in 'detecting cheaters', and we can improve our capacity to do so with skills of observation and of interpretation by use of reputation and by cross-reference of conduct across different settings. This is of great importance in the discussion of trust (taken up in Chapter 9).

### Interests and motives

Motives for action go further than interests. Self-interest is not the same as self-love. Self-love can include love for conscience and ethical principles, as part of self-respect, as Rousseau among others proposed. Selfishness can come from a strong, self-confident ego that submits his or her environment to his or her interests in order to feed the self further. One can do good for others to receive recognition for it, to feed an inflated self even more. But selfishness can also come from a weak ego that is disappointed in itself and its environment and cannot live with their limitations, leading it to grasp at narcissistic delusions of power over others without wanting to submit to relations with them. One can then do good to others as a price to pay for admiration, confirmation and fulfilment of a puny, empty self. Perhaps here lies the difference between egotism and egocentrism. One can also do good for others in a sincere attempt to cut loose from egotism or egocentrism in order to exercise empathy and acceptance of one's limitations and of the right of others to their freedom and independence.

Altruism is often dismissed as being against human nature. The idea is, above all, that the urge towards survival, the *conatus essendi*, and towards the acquisition and maintenance of the resources needed for it 'is in our genes'. For Levinas too, only the urge to survival is natural, and conscience lies outside it. The question then is: where does it lie? Levinas suggested that it is inspired by God, but a very different conception of God than usual. I think it lies in our nature, next to and in a tension with our urge to survival. It is also in our genes to strive for loyalty and altruism, and for legitimacy and appreciation of the self in relevant groups. Earlier it was thought that these characteristics could not have a place in evolution; but according to more recent insights it can (see pp. 000–000). In short, in our nature we have both an urge to personal survival and an urge to loyalty and benevolence. Under pressure of survival the first will dominate; but when conditions allow the latter can be built on. This is not new and had been proposed earlier, e.g. by David Hume and Adam Smith, though we do now have better evolutionary arguments for it.

In economic science thought about self-interest has its roots in utilitarianism; but the insight has been lost somewhere along the way that the utilitarians (Jeremy Bentham, J. S. Mill, Adam Smith) were oriented to

the common good and accepted that at times individual interest had to be sacrificed for the greater good of all. In economic thought the self has increasingly become disconnected from its environment and the common good.

Brennan and Pettit (2004, p. 18) say that economics gives 'an austere picture of human beings as centres of self-interest that operate out of society, without normative expectations or evaluations of themselves or one another'. 'Self-interest' is mostly interpreted narrowly as only material self-interest such as profit or wealth, and intrinsic factors – such as satisfaction in work or action, societal appreciation, or happiness in the happiness of others – often remain outside of consideration. While it is granted that logically those could be part of self-interest, in fact they tend to be neglected. Altruism is almost always excluded as infeasible or even undesirable. It is standard practice in economics to refer, in assumptions of self-interest, to Adam Smith's argument of the 'invisible hand' (in his *Wealth of Nations*); but as Smith pointed out self-interest can go against collective interest and therefore must be subjected to constraints. He also (in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*) provided arguments against the notion that compassion (he calls it 'sympathy') is in fact self-satisfaction and says 'that whole account of human nature, however, which deduces all sentiment and affections to self-love, which has made so much noise in the world, but which, so far as I know, has never yet been fully and distinctly explained, seems to me to have arisen from confused misapprehension of the system of sympathy' (Smith 1976 [1759], p. 317, quoted in Powell, 2010). That 'noise' in economic thought has resounded far in politics and policy, and has carried us away from good sense and from humanism. It has institutionalized egotism in society. Everything had to go via the market which was seen as a surrender to egotism. Erroneous notions in economic science have misled us. This is a scandal. I wish economists had read Smith better.<sup>4</sup>

The relation of this issue to that of free will is as follows. Some say that if altruism does not arise from free will but from an automatism, in the emotions or instincts, it is not 'real' altruism – that altruism requires free choice. But that argument can also be turned around. If an action is spontaneous and without rational forethought it can no longer be self-interested because that requires calculation of advantages and disadvantages. Spontaneous, impulsive actions indeed often go against reasoned self-interest, for example in the well-known problem of the 'weakness of the will' in the conduct of addicts. One can also turn the argument of automatic actions against the argument brought against altruism that what seems a spontaneous altruistic action is in fact based on a weighing of self-interest. In view of the unconscious nature of impulse to the action this is not plausible. The fact that unconscious or unreasoned impulses lead to some sacrifice to others gives a confirmation, not a rejection, of the existence of altruism. If someone without thinking catches someone who falls, snatches someone away

# PROOF

*Free Will?* 99

from an oncoming car, it is both odd and perverse to call that self-interest. Dealing with altruism and its limits in relation to self-interest requires skill in the art of trust (see Chapter 9).

Earlier I indicated that for the highest level of freedom, in determining what we find that we should want, we need others to coach us away from our prejudices and misconceptions. Adam Smith (of all people) has already said this: 'we can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them' (Smith 1976, pp. 109–10, cited by Powell, 2010). Smith had already recognized the need for the other. Again, I wish economists had read Smith better.

# 5

## Embodied Cognition

In earlier chapters I have indicated that in this book I employ a (philosophical) pragmatic perspective, according to which ideas are useful but uncertain fictions that we adopt, mostly unconsciously, as a basis for action and which we confirm, revise, transform or replace according to our experience of success, failure or novel opportunities. In trying out ideas we act like scientists and entrepreneurs. In this chapter I will elaborate on that, discussing the link between 'embodied cognition' and 'neural Darwinism' and the way in which cognitive transformation on the basis of experience may take place.

Recall that pragmatism in the philosophical sense does not mean that usefulness for application determines the value of science. Certainly, science is to be applied, and also philosophy does well to return from abstraction to life in the world. However, utility cannot be assessed in advance, and should not be assessed on the basis of existing practice, because it always stands ready to be changed by the application of science. Any particular application of science must be allowed to fail if necessary, and that failure prompts changes in science.

### Embodied cognition

What does the human being know? What and how does he or she think? How does any of that relate to feelings and judgements? What is the relation of knowledge to the world? A tenacious tradition in Western thought, under the influence first of Plato, then of religion, then of Descartes, is that body and soul are separate, and thereby reason and passion, knowing and feeling, are also separate. For salvation and eternal life the soul cannot be inseparably tied to the body. For true knowledge and for rationality the mind must transcend the bodily and the material. Only disembodied, universal and eternal ideas, abstracted from the chaotically differentiated and variable reality of experience, yield certain and stable knowledge – or so Plato proposed. For transparency of the self to itself also the mind must stand apart from the body.

Such separation of body and mind is now seen as an illusion. That insight began with Spinoza and was also familiar to Nietzsche. On the basis of neural science and social psychology we know and increasingly understand how and to what extent body and mind, and thereby thinking and feeling, are intertwined. This yields a harsh conclusion that snatches away all solace of a hereafter and throws the human being back on itself. But that is also a throwing of people onto each other, we will have to do with that more than ever. Belief in a God and a hereafter distracts us from that and lessens the urgency of it.

The embodiment of cognition, the intertwining of body and mind, not only robs us of the illusion of life after death but also the illusion of a free, self-transparent, autonomous self that so to speak hovers above the body and its limitations. Our self is chained to the body and that gives a feeling of being locked up, and a will of the self to escape from itself. That theme is of fundamental importance, for example, in the philosophy of Levinas, as I will discuss in Chapter 8. Here it is important because it forms an important part of the argument for otherhumanism: the self wants to escape from the imprisonment in the self and turns for that to the other human being.

Because of the embodiment of thinking we must consider not only thought in a reflective, intellectual sense, but also in a wider sense, including perception, interpretation, sense-making, feelings and emotions, and moral judgements. We experience much without understanding. The greatest part of our mental activity is unconscious, and intuitive, unconscious 'thought' directs a large part of our choices, and often does that better, more efficaciously, than rational deliberation would have done (Dijksterhuis 2009). The idea of a self that is not transparent to itself and that cognition is rooted in the body and intertwined with feelings is not new: it goes back to for example Montaigne, Pascal, Spinoza and Nietzsche and returns in the work of Merleau-Ponty (1942, 1964), in the current stream of 'embodied cognition' (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Edelman 1987, 1992; Damasio 1995, 2003) and in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. It is also rooted in the American stream of philosophical pragmatism of James, Peirce, Dewey and G. H. Mead, and later adherents such as Hans Joas.

We cannot doubt everything, as Descartes attempted to do. At any moment we cannot do otherwise than act on the basis of largely tacit, implicit views and dispositions, which we adapt in action according to our experience with obstacles, conflicts, new insights and new opportunities, in interaction with our physical and social environment. This is difficult to reconcile with the idea, as in economic science, of rational conduct in the form of a weighing of alternative means for optimal realization of prior goals. Goals and means become clear only in action. Action yields an articulation of goals before it goes on to shift them. That process is driven by interaction and communication with other people who oppose us with

their ideas, goals and convictions. Action, cognition and communication are inherently social and the 'methodological individualism' of economics fails fundamentally. As a result we suffer considerably from economic thought in our society.

I adopt Peirce's view that truth is related to refutability. In that sense I also follow the corresponding critical rationalism of Karl Popper. Some proposition about the world is provisionally or potentially true if it can be, but has not yet been, refuted by logical, theoretical or empirical argument and, usually, with a combination of these. Truth is functional, not ontological. It is also public or intersubjective.

I go beyond the pragmatism of Peirce in claiming that ideas are shifted not only due to refutation but also on the occasion of meeting with an alternative idea that is equally successful in explaining or predicting phenomena but is theoretically attractive for its elegance, simplicity or contribution to the coherence of our knowledge. Logically, this is based on the Duhem–Quine thesis: theory is underdetermined by its predictions and implications. When a theory makes correct predictions, there can be an infinity of alternative theories that predict equally well. Thus we need an additional selection criterion to select among empirically equivalent theories. Comparison of such empirically equivalent theories may yield novel combinations of old and new ideas, in new theory. Ideas are changed not only because of obstacles but also because of new opportunities that are met. That is also how entrepreneurs deal with innovation.

This yields a coherence view of truth: something is true to the extent that it coheres with what we accept as empirical and theoretical givens. That entails a certain amount of conservatism: we may not (yet) accept an empirical refutation if it would entail rejection of fundamental established and previously well-tested views. I posit this as a descriptive claim: this is how scientists behave, but also as a normative claim: it makes sense not to throw away a well-tested theory at the first bit of contrary evidence. The latter makes economic sense but also epistemic sense, in that, as proposed by Popper (1970, p. 55), by accumulating contrary evidence we are better able to 'find out where a theory's real power lies', by exploring its boundaries of validity and, I add, to gather hints and elements for mending or replacing existing theory in 'novel combinations'. How this may work I elaborate later in a theory of discovery, elaborated previously in Nooteboom (2000). This is my conclusion from the famous debate between Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos and Feyerabend.

New insights in logic, theory or empirical phenomena may in future refute any present truth. Mathematical truths may be irrefutable by definition and logical deduction but they are still not absolute in that they depend on the axioms adopted. Mathematicians know that there are multiple systems of mathematics, each with its own axioms. In one system (in a plane) parallel lines never cross, in another (on a sphere) they do. I do not share Peirce's

view, with which Dewey did agree, that in ongoing debate and adaptation of our knowledge in the end we will converge on absolute truth with which every investigator agrees. We can think, and we have done so, that we have reached the end – until the next scientific revolution stands everything on its head. Our knowledge may for a long time stumble towards a dead end. Whilst working on this text, I have heard on the news that researchers at CERN (the accelerator in Geneva) have found particles that move faster than light, which if confirmed would pull the rug from under much of modern physics.

I also disagree with some other views of Peirce, for example his view of ‘meaning’ as the sum total of practical consequences. This seems similar to the logical positivist view (of Rudolf Carnap) that the meaning of a hypothesis is the method of its (actual or potential) verification – and I disagree with both. I will set out my theory of meaning in Chapter 6.

Next to ‘reference’ or ‘denotation’ the meaning of a notion also includes ‘sense’ or ‘connotation’, defined as the way we identify reference. This entails connections with the meanings of other notions, which differ between any two persons and go beyond the direct practical implications of the notion. Different people have different associations and hence different connotations for any given word. I can also say: a notion never has practical implications by itself but always in combination with other notions in a specific context. The set of potential practical implications is open and in principle unbounded.

With Dewey I share my naturalist stance that cognition results from, and affects, the interaction of mankind with its natural and social environment. My ideas on religion and God also are very similar to those of Dewey. For Dewey mental or spiritual growth is the only ultimate end in life. Self-realization and transcendence also play a central part in my view of the purpose of life, though I emphasize much more than Dewey the importance of the other in such growth and in cognition and ethics. Like Dewey (and Kierkegaard and Nietzsche) I resist the obsession with general, universal, abstract and theoretical principles, which obliterates or sidetracks the specific, individual, concrete and practical.

Pragmatism also connects with existentialism, in the link the latter makes between thought and action. For example, we find it in Heidegger’s philosophy of being in the world (in his *Being and Time*) and in the notion that truth is a process of becoming in the world. The task of thinking is to make ideas fluid, where nothing is fixed in the maelstrom of questioning. That idea also occurred to Nietzsche. This is an antithesis to the fixity of Platonic absolute ideas.

In my further discussion of cognition I will first treat the phenomena in the embodiment of knowledge and thought and the role of interaction. Then I will consider in more detail how it works, and how new knowledge arises in learning and discovery.

### Embodiment and interaction

A fundamental idea is that cognitive functions (perception, interpretation, explanation, evaluation, judgement, language) build on feelings and underlying emotions and bodily functions. This idea is not new but becomes more tangible in terms of neural structures and processes (see e.g. Damasio 2003, 2010; Edelman 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1997). While it is not logically or methodologically necessary to have a neural theory at the basis of a theory of cognition it does greatly help. Insight into neural processes can resolve puzzles in the theory of knowledge – and a theory that is in flagrant contradiction to neural science is difficult to maintain. The idea of ‘embodied cognition’ arises not only in neural science but also in the study of phenomena of conduct, e.g. in the work of Horst Hendriks-Jansen (1996) and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2008) and in social psychology. The intertwining of body and mind also entails an intertwining of body and language.

A second fundamental idea, which is now widely accepted, is that knowledge arises from interaction with the environment, especially the social environment. In philosophy it has long been debated whether knowledge comes from outside, in representations in the mind of objects in the world (‘empiricism’, e.g. with Locke) or that it comes from inside, in innate ideas (‘idealism’, e.g. with Descartes). A now widely accepted idea takes an intermediate position: we see, interpret, explain, evaluate and judge the world on the basis of mental categories that we develop in interaction with the environment. We do this on the basis of a ‘generative potential’ or aptitude for the development of certain cognitive functions that we have inherited from biological evolution. Knowledge is thus construed in the mind, but on the basis of categories formed in interaction with the world on the basis of a potential that forms but also constrains development. A question then is how those mental categories arise and what possibilities and limitations they yield.

I will give some examples. Werner and Kaplan (1963) showed that bodily ostensive movements accompany pointing at things by children. Reaching for something develops into pointing, and calling for something develops into a linguistic function of reference. With children that falls onto the fertile ground of an innate competence for the basic categories that lie at the foundation of language (in a ‘generative grammar’, if Noam Chomsky is right). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) also proposed that the construction of mental categories to a large extent is accompanied by proprioception (motoric activities of groping and handling). In the process one learns to survive in an environment of opportunities and threats, pursuit and flight, collaboration and competition, food and poison, paths and obstacles, protection and threat, tools and manual work, etc.

This connects with an evolutionary theory of action, knowledge and language. There is evolution during life (*ontogenesis*), on the basis of genes

that one has been endowed with and circumstances one is confronted with, in which genes arrive at 'expression'; and there is evolution of the species, of gene pools (*phylogenesis*) on the basis of selection, survival and reproduction of the organisms that carry the genes.

In the development of concepts Lakoff and Johnson distinguish middle-level categories (such as 'chair', which are at the level of the objects we deal with in our primary experience in the world) higher order, derived categories (such as 'furniture') and lower order categories of special cases (such as baby-chairs). The basic level of meaning, on which others are based, is the middle level. That is the highest level at which:

- Abstraction can still be represented by a prototype in the form of an iconic image, such as a 'typical' chair;
- Members of a group have more or less the same overall form;
- People conduct similar motions and actions with these members.

This is the level at which most of our knowledge is organized. With 'furniture' one knows less easily what representative object to choose, and actions with a table are very different from those with a chair.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, middle-level concepts are most likely to be 'realistic'. That is plausible from an evolutionary perspective. Those concepts have the greatest chance of being realistic that were most crucial for survival in evolution. Action on the basis of delusional concepts at that level in the evolution of man would have contributed to extinction. If we did not have an adequate representation of lifeless objects and live beings, of food, of dangerous animals on our path, of friend and foe, of stones as weapon or obstacle, of tools, of homes or other forms of shelter, etc., our chance of survival would have been small. That applies much less at higher ('superordinate') and lower ('subordinate') levels of meaning. It is more urgent not to make a mistake in the identification of the sabre-toothed tiger, with its features of running and devouring, than to assign it to the genus of mammals correctly. The more ordinary thought is, i.e. the closer to material everyday life, the more reliable it is. As we move further away, as we do in philosophy, from the ordinary things that we handle in daily life, the greater the chance is that we will get lost in unrealistic, footloose ideas.

Pinker (1995, p. 420) recognized a series of more or less prestructured mental modules, or dispositions to develop them, as a condition for survival under the circumstances in which we have evolved. I will cite a number of them, with some modifications:

- Mechanism: movements, forces, deformation that objects undergo;
- Biology: feeling for the function, such as related to food or danger, of plants and animals;
- Natural kinds versus artefacts;

- Numbers;
- Mental maps of environments;
- Habitat: safety, inhabitability, food;
- Emotions of disgust and fear of danger;
- Feelings of own functioning and well-being;
- Psychology: 'theory of mind' – the ascription of conduct of people to their emotions and feelings and vice versa;
- Assessment of self: meaning and value to others;
- Justice: rights, duties, achievements, reciprocity and indignation over injustice;
- Kinship;
- Reproduction.

Sign language goes much deeper and further than we (the non-deaf) are ordinarily aware of. The importance of motoric activities in the development of mental categories is illustrated in the detailed phenomenological analysis of animals, especially primates, who most resemble human beings, and of people, especially children, as conducted among others by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2008). She has shown the importance of movement, and the feeling and perception of movement (kinaesthetics) of the body, in the development of cognition and meaning in evolution and individual development. The grasp of intentions, goals, emotions and conditions in behaviour, involved in walking, running, carrying, fear, attack, flight, threat, welcome, surrender, etc., are narrowly associated with the feeling of one's own body and comparison of it, and its movement and gestures, with those of others. In 'rough and tumble play' children learn about the possibilities and limitations of their bodies and those of others, and that gives a basis for the mutual attunement of the body and conduct in relation to intentions and impulses that form the basis for empathy.

Anthropological research indicates that, in contrast with most if not all animals, human beings from the earliest times shared the care of infants amongst parents, mothers, sisters and brothers. The social condition of growing up requires that from a very young age infants need to observe, interpret, compare and assess the gestures and actions of others, as well as their interaction with others. This stimulates the exercise and development of an inherited potential for altruism. The interweaving of mind and body is of philosophical importance for the nature of identity. If there is no soul or mind distinct from the body, and if cognition is largely unconscious and chaotic, with opposing tendencies and urges competing for expression in action and for survival in the mind, where does identity come from? Can we still speak meaningfully about 'identity'? Is the self not too fragmented, incoherent and unstable to merit the term? Are we identical from one context of action to another, and from one moment to the next? Part of Spinoza's inspiration lies in his basic notion of mind as the idea of the body. The experience of identity derives

from the fact that, fickle, variable and chaotic as the goings on are within us, they are rooted in the body, which yields enough coherence to be that which is selected in evolution to stand or fall as a whole. Feeling our body then is crucial for experiencing identity. This yields all the more argument for the death of identity with the death of the body.

Experiments show how motoric information can play a role in the interpretation of visual information from movement. Unconsciously, people imagine how it is to exercise the conduct they see in others, and to feel whether 'it fits'. People also form an image of their own conduct from the perspective of the other. By imagining themselves in action they imagine how others may see them. Physically, this process is aided by so-called 'mirror neurons' that reflect in us the conduct we see. This contributes to an experience of identity of the self and that of the other.

In summary, we build our mental categories and our sense of identity in bodily and social interaction with others. There lies the theory of embodied cognition as the theory behind the philosophy of the other and *otherhumanism*. The mental importance of bodily movement merits more attention to bodily movement in education.

### Development

Sheets-Johnstone (2008, p. 205) has shown how emotions literally (see the etymology of 'emotion' as related to motion) move us and how specific emotions (such as fear) are narrowly connected with specific complexes of movement (as in flight), in the angle, bending, rotation and stretching of body, neck and limbs, in muscle tone, breathing, rotation of the head, ducking, dodging, in a 'dynamic congruence' of the kinetic (movement) and the affective (feeling). From that congruence between movement and feeling, bodily, kinetic attunement leads on to empathy of attuned emotions in 'emotional resonance'. We recognize emotions because we recognize the kinetic expression of them. While in attunement we adjust our body-emotion complex by 'bumping into each other' (the children in their rough and tumble play), we learn to imitate in empathy our perceived body-emotion complexes. We move our hand to our head while we watch the signs of another's headache. This source of empathy is of crucial importance in the relation between self and other as a basis for benevolence and trust. From movement and the emotions they express we infer intentions and underlying beliefs, judgements, preferences, (dis)approvals and values.

This contributes to our understanding of the complications involved in the assimilation of ethnic or cultural minorities: foreigners and indigenous people don't understand each other, not so much intellectually as emotively, which for that reason is not something one can explain away as a simple misunderstanding, and which works as an obstacle for the empathy that is needed for mutual trust.

Important, in particular, is the bodily interaction between mother and child in the processes of care, such as feeding and cuddling, with the exchange of noises and smiles, reaching and giving, turning to and turning away, nodding and shaking, which develop the capability to take turns at acting, paying attention and responding which is needed for the linguistic and moral capacity to alternate speaking and listening (ibid., p. 213).

It is also important to note that attunement and empathy are spontaneous, not planned, thought about or selected in advance. Thank God for this non-rationality of conduct. As Levinas said: you don't devise it, it happens to you. Though attunement and empathy are unconsciously motivated they are at the same time consciously experienced – and they 'make sense' in the double meaning of making clear and creating meaning (ibid., pp. 208–9). Beware, however, that empathy can also serve to increase the effectiveness of malice. By understanding and sensing the feelings and motives of others one can harm them more effectively.

In summary, sense making, understanding and inference, and thereby rationality, are deeply rooted in bodily motion. The view discussed here of cognition in a wide sense, including perception, evaluation and the corresponding feelings, as a construction based on experience in interaction with others, brings a shift with it from traditional Western philosophy going back to Plato (emerging again in the Enlightenment with the subject, the self, as an objective bystander and observer of the self and its environment) to the view of the self as a participant that cannot easily step out of its role as participant. This shows that the traditional separation of subject and object is problematic. This also gives an existentialist turn that we find, among others, in Nietzsche, Heidegger and Levinas.

I also build upon the experimental work in the development of children of Piaget and Vygotsky, and their notion of intelligence as 'internalized action'. Partly based on these sources I hold an interactivist-constructivist notion of knowledge according to which our categories of perception, interpretation and evaluation are construed in brain and body on the basis of interaction with the world. Vygotsky (1962) proposed the notion of a 'zone of proximal development' (ZOPED): teachers pull pupils beyond their current capacity of understanding and practice, and thereby elicit the blossoming of potential. This is connected with the notion of 'scaffolding' (the support of an arc under construction until it carries itself). The teacher or parent supports the construction of understanding until the capacity of the pupil or child is self-supporting.

The notion of cognition being constructed from experience, and experience being, in that sense, a 'material cause' of cognition, may seem to go back to Lockean, empiricist philosophy that cognition is construction by 'association', from 'building blocks' that arise from perception and which are seen as a passive reception or reflection of reality. The term 'construction', however, is susceptible to two opposite misunderstandings. The first

is the misapprehension that mental construction takes place in the mind as a blank space, a vacuum, without any prior direction, basis or disposition, as if our capability for mental construction is indeterminate and boundless. Earlier I indicated that we have a cognitive generative capacity, inherited from evolution, which directs and constrains cognition. While 'association' seems somehow passive and universal in the sense that different people with the same perceptions would yield the same results from association, here cognitive perception is idiosyncratic, depending on cognitive categories previously constructed along individual life trajectories. Here also perception is assumed to be a matter of cognitive construction so that there is no rock-bottom empirical basis for objectivity.

The other, opposite misapprehension that may be wrapped up in the notion of construction is that there is a prior design that has been consciously selected or made as the basis for a goal-oriented choice and selection of 'building blocks'. In fact the process is highly unconscious and emergent from internal dispositions and capabilities that are triggered and fulfilled by impulses from the environment. The term 'construction' also suggests that building blocks stay unchanged in the process. In fact elements that are taken up in construction are refashioned or transformed as part of the process and cannot be seen as given and fixed. This connects to the pragmatic perspective (in a philosophical sense) indicated before.

The trouble we have in putting all this into words, the need to use metaphors from building, and the trouble we then have in avoiding misunderstanding illustrates how much our thinking and our language is biased by categories derived from our evolutionary experience with things in space and time. We do not have the right words at hand here.

One of the fundamental consequences of a constructivist view of knowledge is of course that objective testing of knowledge is problematic. We cannot step out of our thought to see how it is 'hooked onto reality' (another awkward metaphor). Every test occurs on the basis of an observation that is itself dependent on cognitive categories. Thus we risk the confirmation of one prejudice on the basis of another. Precisely because of that, interaction with others is needed, who on the basis of other experiences have developed different knowledge – and this is the only more or less independent touchstone that we have. For knowledge and learning we need the other in order to have any chance of being rid of our own prejudices. But this also has its limitations: others too cannot easily step away from the constraints of their evolutionary heritage and social conditioning. Furthermore, if others thought radically differently from us they would not make sense and they could not help.

In summary: I take cognition as a wide concept, including proprioception, kinaesthetics, perception, interpretation, explanation, evaluation, and an array of feelings and emotions. This is associated with the notion of 'embodied cognition' according to which cognition, neural processes and

physiology are intertwined. Rationality is shot through with feelings and emotions. We are full of paradox and we are not transparent to ourselves. Here I follow a line that goes back to Pascal, Montaigne and beyond.

### How does it work?

How, more concretely, do the connections between thinking and feeling, between body and mind, work? Another part of the inspiration from Spinoza is the basic idea of 'the mind as the idea of the body' where 'the mind not only experiences the modifications of the body, but also the ideas of such modifications' (Spinoza, *Ethics*, part II, proposition 22).

Building on ideas from Spinoza, Damasio (2003, 2010) has proposed a hierarchy of effects upwards from the body to different levels of mind. The inspiration from Spinoza lies partly in the notion of '*conatus*': bodily and mental processes are geared to an organism that has developed mechanisms to maintain itself and its well-being. This fits well with the evolutionary perspective. Different levels of body/mind reflect different stages of evolution. The 'hierarchy' that Damasio proposes goes up from immune responses, basic reflexes and metabolic regulation to experience of pain and pleasure, drives and motivations, emotions, feelings and thoughts. Emotions are automatic, mostly triggered by perception, but modulated by combinations of perception and thought. Without emotions there are no actions. In other words, emotions are triggered by action and they trigger action. Indeed, emotions are defined as 'largely automatic, evolutionarily determined programmes of action' (Damasio 2010, p. 132). In evolution emotions came first, enabling organisms to respond automatically to the environment.

According to Damasio feelings go beyond emotions. 'Feelings' of emotion are 'perceptions of what happens in our body when we act emotionally' (ibid.). Feelings thereby build upon emotions, by prolonging their impact by storage in memory, providing opportunities for comparison and foresight, allowing responses to become less automatic and more creative. Emotions are more difficult to hide than feelings. According to this analysis animals have emotions but a limited range of feelings. Damasio (2003) proposes that in our brains we conduct an extensive mapping of our bodily functioning, in specific brain regions fed by neurons from distributed parts of the body, as well as by bloodstreams containing chemicals (e.g. lack of glucose in the blood creating the appetite of hunger), and that feelings are mental representations (neural patterns) of such mappings. Damasio considers this ability to make mental maps the 'characteristic feature of the brain' (Damasio 2010, p. 80). A vast proportion of the representations that arise in the brain are shaped by signals from the body. William James had already proposed that feelings are perceptions of the body changed by emotion. According to this, feelings are preceded by emotions, as they were in evolution, as representations of emotions. From these mappings signals are sent to the body triggering the

secretion of chemicals, the action of muscles and coordinated movements. Hence the mappings arise due to both action from the body and action on the body.

The representation of the body in the mind is a dynamic equilibrium of many mutually conditioning and modulating processes, with lapses of conflict and contrariety, that converge on the mind from the body, rather than any static configuration. This is why our self is not quite fixed and we are 'flung to and fro' and 'are in two minds' about things. Yet there normally is a more or less stable whole that we can see as our self. A felt coherence of mappings related to bodily coherence produces a sense of self.

The 'hierarchy' in effects from the body to different levels of mind isn't quite a hierarchy in that there are shifts and interactions up and down between levels. There can even be 'downward causation' in that 'higher-level' processes can affect lower-level ones. For example, moral awareness that certain drives have negative consequences can produce emotions that affect the selection conditions on the basis of which lower-level drives develop. As discussed in Chapter 4, this is relevant for the discussion of free will. We are not free in that our actions arise from unconscious causal processes in the brain, though we are conscious of outcomes – and this can lead to adjustments of the will as part of 'neural Darwinism'.

Representations of the body in the mind form a crucial connection between body and mind, and a basis for a notion of the self and for consciousness. The mind is largely unconscious. It is known only through a 'small window of consciousness' (ibid., p. 205) in which the mind is experienced. This requires a sense of self. From internal perception of bodily maps, the sense of self further develops in interaction with external objects (which yields a sense of being a protagonist) and with a sense of past and future – in short, a biography – and this develops into an identity. Beyond feelings as representations (neural patterns) of mappings from the body, we have yet higher-level neural patterns that constitute thought in the form of categorization, attribution and inference that yield the basis for projection and planning. Damasio's account is certainly not complete, and we seem to be at the beginning rather than the end of our understanding in this field, but along these lines we begin to get an idea of how a mind with different levels, a consciousness and a sense of identity can arise 'as a concert that starts without a conductor and in the performance creates a conductor' (ibid., p. 38).

Damasio reports how in epilepsy temporary loss of such bodily mapping yields a loss of mind. Without a finely tuned 'homeostatic' system of many interacting parts and processes our body would not function, and this coherence, reflected in mental mappings of the body, finds its way into our notion of the self as a unified whole. For the mapping of the body, 'many mapping sites and connections are present at birth ... predetermining many ideas of the body [so that] some ideas of the body are ... highly constrained

by prior design of the brain and the organism's overall needs' (Damasio 2003, pp. 200, 202).

We empathize with other people by simulating in our bodily maps the corresponding bodily states, emotions and feelings that are triggered by observing other people. This mirroring is of crucial importance for the empathy that people need for social functioning. Networks of neurons map structures of bodily processes and gestures that the self performs in the world, so that via the body the external world is brought into the mapping. This is how the building of cognition from experience is embodied, which will be important for my later discussion on language and meaning in Chapter 6; in particular for the idea that our mental apparatus is biased towards, shaped on the basis of, bodily movement in the world that, I argue, yields an 'object bias' in our thought.

The analysis is also in line with the notion from social psychology of partly complementary, partly rivalrous 'mental frames' that shape perceptions and interpretations, trigger action patterns and are in turn triggered by perceptions from the environment of the subject. Actions and other manifestations of other people are interpreted as 'relational signals', as a function of the mental frame the observer is in, which leads to an attribution of a mental frame the other is in and which triggers corresponding action sequences. Depending on the context and its triggers, one is in one frame or another, with other frames 'in the background'. The frame determines how the situation is perceived and triggers actions that enact the frame. One may switch frames when discrepancies between perceptions and the current frame exceed some limit. For example we have frames of 'guarding one's interests' versus frames of 'solidarity' (Lindenberg 2003), which connects with the duality of motivations of self-interest and benevolence that goes back, at least, to David Hume.

Emotions go along with bodily manifestations (facial expressions, gestures, blushing, panting, dilation of pupils, beating of the heart, stomach cramp, etc.) that are difficult to control. This latter fact helps us to identify 'cheaters' on the basis of the bodily manifestation of the emotions corresponding with their intentions. A proviso here is that such links are not severed in some abnormal condition, as with someone with a brain defect by which he or she does not feel shame or fear.

Damasio (2003, pp. 43–6) distinguishes three types of emotions. Primary emotions such as fear, anger, happiness, sadness, revulsion and surprise are universal across cultures and species, though there is variation in the stimulus that triggers them. There are social emotions such as sympathy, shame, guilt, pride, jealousy, envy, gratitude, admiration, indignation and contempt. Primary emotions are triggered in the amygdala and social emotions in the (ventromedial) prefrontal regions of the brain, and they are enacted in the hypothalamus, the basal forebrain and the brain stem. The hypothalamus releases chemicals that alter the internal equilibrium

of the body, the functioning of viscera (heart, digestive tract, etc.), the musculo-skeletal system and the central nervous system. For example, peptides such as oxytocin and vasopressin are released that make us feel good in collaboration, while deviations from social norms or standards trigger feelings of discomfort (Kosfeld et al. 2006).

### Evolution

Which of all this comes from evolution, in phylogenesis, and which from the environment in which the human being develops, in ontogenesis? It seems obvious that from evolution the human being has inherited an instinct towards survival. Without it it would not have survived. This emerges in the old notion of the *conatus essendi* (that was used by Spinoza but goes back much further). Less obvious is that the human being has also inherited an instinct towards loyalty and altruism, including (a certain extent of) sacrifices for others, especially, perhaps exclusively, within his or her own group. This is not obvious because one might think that in evolution altruists would lose out against opportunists who exploit them. This has been the common view, but there is a more recent logic by which such instinct is consistent with evolutionary logic. I will present the arguments later in Chapter 10. Here I note that a material basis has been found in a psychological reward for benevolence in collaboration: the oxytocin and the 'mirror neurons' already mentioned, by which we mirror in ourselves the gestures and emotions of others, which gives a material basis for empathy.

The conclusion is that the human being is driven by two often contrary instincts as a heritage from evolution: an urge to survival and an inclination towards loyalty to the (own) group. This connects with a widespread intuition that the human being is driven by two such rival inclinations (e.g. David Hume). This opposition of instincts has large consequences, for example in the literature on trust (see Nooteboom 2002). The notion and workings of trust will be discussed in some detail in Chapter 9.

Here I will discuss the development of cognition during the life of people. Here also one can employ evolutionary logic, but now at the level of neurons and their patterns of interaction. The programmatic significance of evolutionary thought is that it forces us to explain development not as the result of conscious, goal-directed, top-down, rational design, but as selection from among a repertoire of activity sequences on the occasion of the demands and opportunities of specific contexts. This fits with the pragmatic view of revision under action.

Edelman's (1987, 1992) 'neural Darwinism' seems to yield a viable perspective for understanding how embodied cognition might work in terms of neural networks (or 'neuronal groups', as he calls them). In the mind we have diverse, parallel and rival mental processes, triggered by external conditions, competing for strength and reinforcement. Neuronal groups arise

more or less by chance as trials and are selected and reinforced according to operative success. That success is defined by emotions or feelings that are experienced as agreeable. Reinforcement arises in the frequency, speed and continuity with which neuronal groups operate, in terms of easier passage of the thresholds between neurons (synapses) and a greater density of connections with other such groups. New groups arise from combinations between existing ones. The regular joint firing of neurons can lead to connections between them: 'firing yields wiring'.

How does this relate to the idea of an evolutionarily determined disposition towards certain mental patterns? This idea should mean that certain patterns of firing are preferred, if not in a prior wiring then in a disposition towards it. There is a tendency towards localization of functions in the brain and connections between them. Thus for language there is a 'centre' for grammar (the Broca region) and a centre for the meaning of words (the Wernicke region). That localization, however, is not entirely fixed, and connections can be more important than location (Pinker 1995).

According to Edelman, memory, both short and long term, is not the 'retrieval' of some entity, but a process of recategorization, of reactivating and, in the process, of possibly shifting the process of selection among neuronal groups. This implies, in particular, that memory also is context-dependent, and that the process of recall may affect the template of future recall.

The fundamental point of all this is the following. In customary thought we are inclined to find it self-evident that competence precedes performance, meanings precede language use, and knowledge precedes action. The mechanism of selection between neuronal groups shows how it can also be the other way around, with performance preceding competence, meanings arising from language use, and knowledge arising from action. It shows how mental structures can arise from experience in a way that leaves room for shifts, transformation and variation across contexts. This underpins pragmatism and is relevant for the classic 'problem of universals', for issues of meaning and for sense making in the theory of language and communication. In this book it is important as a background for the discussion of the relation between self and other in cognition, language and ethics. First I want to discuss more deeply the processes of mental and emotional development of children. This is important in itself but also for an attempt to understand the work of Levinas.

### **Formation of the self**

As discussed earlier, according to Sheets-Johnstone mutual attunement of children in rough and tumble play serves to explore the vulnerability and robustness of their bodies and those of others. The rough and tumble is characterized by running, jumping up and down with both feet, hitting each

other with an open hand, falling and throwing on a soft surface, pretending by way of gestures of attack and defence, and yelling and laughter. This is not random, senseless activity. It helps children to develop attunement and thereby establish a basis for empathy. Sheets-Johnstone demonstrates the 'dynamic congruence' between movement and feeling, which develops into empathy in 'emotional resonance'. We recognize emotions because we recognize the bodily expression of them, followed by the underlying intentions, preferences and values, in a deepening and enrichment of insight as life experience and knowledge increase.

One observes others to see oneself. By learning to express feelings in and with their bodies, babies learn to recognize experiences in the movement and expressions of others, before they learn to see themselves from the perspective of others that look at them. 'My own body is the standard upon which I apperceive the other; the body of the other is the standard upon which I come to apperceive myself as a visual form' (Sheets-Johnstone (2008, p. 293). In attunement children begin to explore the modalities and boundaries of confidence and fear. They learn how expression relates to their own bodies, they see this reflected in the movements of others, and then they learn to see themselves from the perspectives of others. They learn to see and recognize how emotions are expressed in distinctive complexes of movement that are characteristic of specific emotions. As they develop further, they learn to recognize and infer intentions, preferences and underlying values, and to see how others might see theirs. While in attunement they adapt their body-emotion complex from 'bumping into others', in empathy they imitate or reproduce observed body-emotion complexes.

In other words, in the development of the self we draw, as it were, the other into ourselves. This is of great importance for a philosophy of the other, such as that of Levinas, who did not include such ontogenetic, emotional-cognitive development in his considerations.

While empathy is not necessarily for the good, and may be used to increase the effectiveness of malice, it is a necessary condition for benevolence. So at least we are capable of benevolence, if we grow up well. The biological potential we have may be neglected or enhanced by culture in the way in which children are neglected or cared for and educated. Important, in particular, is the bodily interaction between mother and child in the processes of caring.

According to Sheets-Johnstone infants have a natural disposition towards openness to other beings, exhibited in the smile they show from early infancy, as an expression of pleasure 'when beholding the presence of a human partner' (ibid., p. 351), which invites attunement of affects. This is important because in the give and take of relationships someone must make a start. They also have a natural disposition towards play, which provides a basis for creativity as a spontaneous drive, not aimed at self-interest or dominance. Both dispositions can be enhanced or suppressed in ontogenetic development.

On the other hand, children also have a natural startle reflex in the face for unexpected events, as a normal disposition to protect themselves from possible danger, from an awareness of vulnerability. This fuels fear, which may first yield a tendency to withdraw from danger, but may also be transformed into anger and attack in order to dispose of the source of the fear. Infants have a natural tendency towards aggressive acts at some time ('after the eighth month'), but at first, Sheets-Johnstone claims, this is merely an expression of life exuberance and is not associated with fear, while later it can be put to the service of experiences of fear. Sheets-Johnstone also reports a claim from the literature that children have a natural tendency towards 'stranger anxiety', from a sense of vulnerability in the face of a stranger or unpredictable others. She does not indicate the origin of stranger anxiety. Could this be related to an instinct for altruism inside one's own group and suspicion and prejudice against outsiders? These dispositions also may develop in several directions in ontogenetic development, in a 'socialization of fear' (ibid., p. 366). Social and cultural conditions may lead to a suppression or denial of fear, in a warrior ethic, with a rejection of fear and benevolence as 'unmanly', in a 'fear of shame and shame of fear' (ibid., p. 370). Stranger anxiety may develop into xenophobia, enhanced by religion and nationalism. Fear of loss or want, and a feeling that the self is not real, or meaningless, yields a drive towards ever more possession, consumption and power to cover a sense of lack.

This connects with Schopenhauer's view of the will to satisfy ever new desires in a flight from boredom. It also connects with the analysis of narcissism from Lasch (1991). In the early development of children there is a first, natural narcissism in which the infant cannot distinguish between self and other and has the feeling of controlling the mother. Then comes the shocking discovery that the mother has an existence and will of her own that cannot be controlled. This hits hard, especially for the human child that is born far too early, as was necessary in evolution for the large human head to pass through the birth channel, and thereby is far too dependent on the mother to be able to support itself. There is a tension between a longing for reunification with the mother and the fact of separation. Lasch (1991, p. 242) says about this: 'the best hope of emotional maturity, then, appears to lie in a recognition of our need for and dependence on people who nevertheless remain separate from ourselves and refuse to submit to our whims. It lies in recognition of others not as projections of our own desires but as independent beings with desires of their own. More broadly, it lies in acceptance of our limits. The world does not exist merely to satisfy our desires'. Next the challenge is, in the acceptance of the limitations in ourselves and our environment, not to fall into defeatism and to maintain our ideals.

If, still according to Lasch, the child does not overcome the shock well and retains a lasting feeling of lack of support and cherishing from outside it can create an image for itself of a virtual ideal parent that becomes part of

the self and thereby can be controlled. It can develop a delusion of a state of complete self-sufficiency and denial of any dependence on others, or a delusion that others can be controlled and manipulated to satisfy its longings. The environment does not satisfy that and evokes resentment and a need for confirmation that is at the same time mistrusted and can never be fully satisfied. Thus a secondary narcissism can arise that is perverse, internally inconsistent and difficult to treat psychiatrically.

In what direction development goes depends crucially on what happens in infancy. It is crucial for people to learn to understand the opposing tendencies in human nature, as a basis for making the best of them, cultivating those that are life enhancing rather than life destroying (Sheets-Johnstone 2008, p. 405). We should recognize the good side: human beings have 'capacities for attunement, reciprocity, a sense of connectedness, play and creativity', which yield a basis for caring, in opposition to aggression, 'harm to others, pursuit of power, immortality, money, excitement, fame, and so on'.

According to the account given by Hendriks-Jansen (1996), infants do not have an innate language capability as claimed by Chomsky. They have innate repertoires of activity sequences, such as facial 'expressions', eye movements and myopic focusing, kicking movements, randomly intermittent bursts of sucking when feeding, and random gropings. At the beginning these movements do not signify anything nor do they seek to achieve anything, and they certainly do not express any internal representations of anything. The mother, however, instinctively assigns meanings and intentions where there are none, and this sets a dynamic of interaction going in which meanings and intentions get assigned to action sequences selected from existing repertoires on the occasion of specific contexts of interaction. Thus the random pauses in sucking are falsely picked up by the mother as indications of a need to jiggle the baby back into feeding action. In fact it is not the jiggling but on the contrary the stopping of it that prods the baby to resume the action. The taking turns in stops and jiggles does not serve any purpose of feeding, as the mother falsely thinks, but a quite different purpose for which evolution has 'hijacked' (or 'exapted', i.e. adopted with adaptation) what was thrown up by previous evolution. It is 'used' to ready the child for the 'turn taking' that is basic for communication: in communication one speaks and then stops to let the other speak. Here, the child acts, stops and triggers the mother to action, who jiggles and then stops and thereby triggers the baby to action.

At first, the infant can focus its vision only myopically, which serves to concentrate on the mother and her scaffolding, not to be swamped by impressions from afar. Later, the scope of focusing vision enlarges and the infant randomly fixes its gaze on objects around it. The mother falsely interprets this as interest and hands the object to the infant, thereby generating interest. The child is then prone to prod the mother's hand into picking up objects, first without and later with looking at the mother.

Groping and prodding develop into pointing, which forms the basis for reference and which is the basis for meaning and language. While the child points and utters sounds, the mother responds with the correct words, and so language capability develops. In egocentric speech the child starts to provide his or her own scaffolding, which further contributes to the development of his or her own identity. Along these lines, meaning and intentionality do not form the basis for action but arise from it with the aid of scaffolds from the context. It seems clear that the learning of turn taking, in interaction between mother and baby, in combination with feelings of safety in a life stage of extreme dependence, also provides a basis for reciprocity and trust.

### A logic of discovery

The question now is whether we can say more about how 'mental structures arise from experience'. Or in the words of Simone de Beauvoir (1995: 28) how 'The human being in its creativity leans on a previous creation to create the possibility of a new creation'.

If according to pragmatism ideas drive action but are then transformed according to failure and new opportunities encountered in their application, how does this work? This requires no less than a theory of discovery or invention (I take these two terms to be synonymous). Learning has two meanings. One can learn by adopting already existing knowledge from others; and one can learn by discovery, that is by developing new knowledge from one's own experience. I want to discuss the second.

Gregory Bateson proposed levels of learning in his *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind* (1972). At a lower level of 'first order' learning, we maintain basic assumptions or logic or design principles. At 'second order' or higher levels we break through such fundamentals to new principles in a 'reevaluation of values'. In the literature on organization and innovation the first is called 'exploitation' and the second 'exploration'. The idea is that these levels of learning then build on each other and transform each other in a process of application and adaptation. The idea that thoughts and intelligence arise as 'internalized action' had been developed much further by Jean Piaget (1970, 1974) in a 'stage theory' of mental development. While Piaget was perhaps primarily a developmental psychologist, he was also, and perhaps at least as much, certainly in his own view, a developmental ('genetic') epistemologist, postulating general principles of development.

The basic principle of development, which for children recurs cyclically at different stages of their development, is that by 'assimilating' experience into an existing cognitive structure in a sequence of steps such a structure is transformed ('accommodated') into a higher level of cognitive functioning. The steps in this sequence are as follows.

On a circle one can start anywhere, and I will start with the stage of 'generalization' in which an existing mental scheme is applied in new

contexts where it is *differentiated* to match novel conditions. A child that has learned to whack a wooden hammer on blocks now tries it out on the cat. The resulting strike of a claw is a painful learning experience. The scheme then undergoes 'reciprocation' with parallel schemes encountered in the novel context, yielding novel combinations in a process of association which lead on to novel mental structures in 'accommodation': use the hammer to stroke the cat or move it on the floor like a mouse to play with the cat.

The process, in particular the step of generalization, is associated with a principle of play to explore practices outside their accustomed arena. We appear to have an instinct for this that is called the 'principle of over-confidence'. Laughter then is enjoyment of surprise, of unexpected shifts of practice. One can also see it as lying behind entrepreneurship. More darkly, it may also be seen as a principle of imperialism: a drive to conquer the world with one's competence.

When I talk of an instinct that suggests an outcome from evolution, what would the evolutionary value be of such an instinct of exploration by generalization? What would it contribute to survival and procreation? Perhaps that it leads to learning and innovation as suggested here.

This stage theory of cognitive development was used by Kolb (1984) for a cycle model of cognition and by me (2000) for a 'cycle of discovery'. The latter was intended to develop insight in organization theory into the problem posed by March (1991) of how exploration and exploitation may arise from each other. The logic is further developed and applied more widely to the renewal of concepts, theory, practice, technology, products, etc. Generalization may then be, for example, the introduction of an existing product into a new market. In science it can be the attempt to apply a theory in a new area as the application of economic theory to art or to households.

The logic of the cycle of discovery is as follows. Generalization is needed for four reasons. First, it is needed to find an opening for deviance from the established order. In established fields there are often strong forces against deviating from established doctrine or practice. These may be mental (it is intellectually tiresome or threatening), social (it is not tolerated) or institutional (an array of rules, structures and customs). For the latter, think of technical standards, criteria for safety or distribution channels.

Second, in the old setting practice has aligned with conditions, or conditions have adjusted to the practice, and there is no new information about limits of use and new opportunities. Popper (1970, p. 55) granted this also in the famous debate on falsification: one needs to milk existing practices for all they are worth 'to find out where their real strengths lie'.

Third, one needs a new setting to generate novel challenges to success and survival, which yield crises that provide a motive for change. In the new environment one encounters new shortcomings that demand change. In earlier innovation literature it had been recognized that one needs a crisis to

give an incentive for change. Nietzsche had said that creation and invention are accompanied by pain. Fourth, one needs novel material, found in the new context, for novel combinations to achieve adaptation.

The change of context in generalization can be real, as in a new market for an existing product, or virtual, as in a computer simulation or a thought experiment, or in a brainstorming session. One can search for the new environment, but it can also present itself – as when someone else comes up with a new idea, theory, technology or product that transforms the selection environment of existing practice.

Change of context upsets the existing order of established practice, which previously had settled into a ‘dominant design’. Mentally, this triggers awareness and a critical scrutiny of tacit routines in background knowledge that had earlier been relegated to ‘subsidiary awareness’ (Polanyi 1962) to the extent that such opening to awareness is possible. In differentiation, to solve the crisis encountered in the novel context one first delves into existing repertoires, with the memory of earlier ideas, practices, trials and experiments that did not survive at the time, but which might work now. When differentiation does not suffice, and the crisis persists, we move on to reciprocation.

Mentally, reciprocation is association: novel ideas arise by connecting previously unconnected existing ideas. In Edelman’s neural Darwinism this is called ‘multiple re-entry’. There it deals with connection and exchange between existing neuronal groups. The novel context is required to encounter new ideas as the material for novel associations. In the process, old ideas acquire new meanings. The novel context provides the scaffold for such novel meanings of old ideas in the generation of new ones. Local ideas and practices that appear to succeed where one’s old ideas fail especially attract attention. Reciprocation entails experimentation with hybrids: old and novel elements are forced together into old basic designs or architectures. The history of technology is full of examples.<sup>1</sup>

Next, hybrids yield tensions, inefficiencies and obstacles to the full utilization of the potential of novel elements that is increasingly crystallizing out. This yields a new crisis, generating the willingness to consider a more drastic, fundamental change in the basic architecture or design logic and insights into where in the old logic the obstacles lie. Experience with the hybrid and its problems may suggest where the main bottlenecks for the realization of emerging potential lie and in what directions new designs may be tried. If reciprocation is two- or many-sided, with an exchange of elements between two or more different practices, then different hybrids may be operating in parallel. This enables comparison of the differential success of different design principles, which may yield indications for novel principles.

This, then, may lead on to accommodation, or second order change, as Bateson (1972) called it, in the form of trials of novel architectures of old and novel elements. This puts strain on the elements, which may need to

be modified to fit in the novel architecture. This may require antecedent innovations in components, including materials and instruments, or it may lead to a cascade of secondary innovations in components, to proceed with the architectural innovation.

At first, there is a chaos of forms and variations in the new practice, in which some old elements persist even though they are at odds with the new logic; and there are overlaps, redundancies and muddles. An illustration of this is that when bridge construction moved from wood to iron there was still use of 'swallow tail' connections that are needed for wood but redundant for iron where the connections could be made with nails or welding.

Diverse designs compete with each other until in a process of consolidation sooner or later a convergence arises on what in the innovation literature is called a 'dominant design'. The competition between old and new designs can last for quite a while. For example, old sailing ships and new steam ships coexisted for quite a while, as a series of paintings by Turner testifies.

In more abstract terms, in the convergence on a dominant design there is a reduction of the variety of content; in generalization there is an increase of the variety of context; and in differentiation and reciprocation there is an increase of the variety of content. Thus, the cycle can be characterized as an alternation of an increase and decrease of variety of context and content.

The reduction of variety of content, in consolidation, goes along with a decrease of uncertainty and an increase of clarity, an increase of familiarity and number of users, and this expansion of interest draws additional suppliers of the novelty. In economics, this leads to increased competition on price. Attention shifts from technical and commercial viability to efficiency of production and use.

The 'logic' of discovery is actually more like a heuristic. The process generally works well, but discovery does not necessarily follow this process. Associations (reciprocation) may arise without prior recall of old practices from memory (differentiation). Transitions between stages may be obstructed. In economic systems, entry barriers to markets may obstruct generalization. Novel challenges that lead to crises may be avoided or blocked by monopoly, oligopoly or incumbent power. Institutionalized practice may disallow deviation from established practice in differentiation and reciprocation.

Perhaps in the brain the cycle is embodied in neural networks, where differentiation operates as an adjustment of synaptic strengths (the 'thresholds') in: connections between neurons; in reciprocation as novel connections between neurons from different networks; and in accommodation as a wholesale reconfiguration of synaptic connections between neurons from previously unconnected networks.

In the next chapter, on language, I will employ the cycle for a theory of meaning change. Here I want to discuss its implications for a deeper insight into why interaction between people is important for learning.

In communicative interaction, at some cognitive distance, people are faced with (i) the need to fit their ideas and practices into the mental frames of the other person and (ii) the incentive to help others to fit your ideas and practices into their cognition. By the inventive use of metaphor and illustrations people can help each other to cross cognitive distance and trigger requisite shifts of thought.

In terms of the cycle of discovery this positing of one's ideas into the minds of others entails generalization. Depending on cognitive distance, this yields misfits in understanding that require adjustment. People will try to 'put it differently', thinking back to how they came to grips with the idea, what other ideas they tried, and what other ideas are related to it, in their experience. In terms of the cycle of discovery, this entails differentiation. As people do this reciprocally, they are stimulated to try and fit elements of the other's thought into their own thinking in hybrids of thought and practice (reciprocation), which stimulate a novel integration of joint thinking and action (accommodation). Cognitive distance may be too small to yield any appreciable shift of cognition, and it may be too large for available absorptive capacity and ability in metaphorical explanation.

That capacity and ability are not fixed. One can increase them by an accumulation of knowledge and of experience in crossing cognitive distance, by which one can communicate more effectively at increasing cognitive distance. However, as one accumulates knowledge one needs to search at increasing cognitive distance to continue to encounter something new; and increasingly one has only oneself to counsel. Geniuses and wise men are lonely.

Growth of knowledge and experience thus has a paradoxical double effect that on the one hand the ability to absorb increases, while on the other hand it becomes more difficult to continue to find something worthwhile to absorb.<sup>2</sup>

The two-sidedness or reciprocity of the process of learning by interaction yields immense leverage, compared to interaction with non-human nature, since in discourse receivers can shift their stance and outlook to catch a meaning, and senders can adapt to such stance in pitching their meaning and revising their metaphors and bring in meanings from yet other contexts. On the receiver end the ability to do this depends on absorptive capacity, i.e. the scope of cognition one has developed, and on the sender side it depends on empathy (i.e. the ability to stand in someone else's cognitive shoes and understand how he or she thinks and feels), on skills in the use of metaphor, and in drawing out understanding from the partner in communication.

Compare this with Vygotsky's notion of ZOPED, which indicates that someone (in this case a tutor) can draw the other (the pupil) beyond his or her current level of cognition. This is lost if in education one leaves learning to the pupil.

Note that the processes described here obfuscate the traditional distinctions made amongst the production and diffusion of innovation, the

transmission and generation of knowledge, and the transmission and generation of variety in evolution. The cycle of discovery is my answer to the old problem of object and subject. Are objects in the world causes of the cognition of the perceiving subject in the form of representations in the mind, as empiricism claims? Or are objects perceived in terms of prior cognitive categories of the subject (such as time, space and causality), as idealism claims? Or are object and subject inseparable (as Schopenhauer claimed)? According to the cycle all three are right. Objects are perceived and made sense of in terms of categories from the subject, though these may be changed (in accommodation) in the process of absorbing perceptions into mental categories (in assimilation).

### Is this evolution?

Is this evolution? It is in general terms that it involves the generation of variety, selection and transmission. In the details of the processes, however, there are fundamental differences with biological evolution. The most important source of variation in biological evolution is blind mutation and crossover of chromosomes. In discovery we do find the emergence of ideas by chance from mistakes and misunderstandings. We also see much trial and error in the processes of generalization, differentiation, reciprocation and accommodation, but that creation of variety is no longer blind or random but based on the inference of promising variations on the basis of experience. In reciprocation there is experimentation with novel combinations of old elements that were successful in the old environment and new elements that are successful in the new environment. This is still a matter of trial and error, but one which is no longer blind. The choice of a new context, in generalization, is no longer arbitrary, but one which can be intelligent in the choice of an environment that is sufficiently different from the old one to yield novel challenges and inspiration, though not so different that the chance of connection to existing practice is small. This is the principle of looking for 'optimal cognitive distance' (Nooteboom 2000).

Second, in economics, culture and politics the carriers of ideas or practices that are selected are able, to a greater or lesser extent, to affect the selection environment to their advantage, to a much greater degree than in biology. Firms can limit competition. Scientists who do not get the required recognition can form their own schools of thought with their own journals and cite each other in them to create legitimation for funding. Politicians can come up with ideas and at the same time, with those ideas, affect the criteria and values that are employed in elections.

Third, both selection and spread of successful ideas and practices at the same time are sources of novelty. If something fails, in selection, then the way in which it fails, and scrutiny of the way in which other things are successful,

yield indications of how it may still succeed. In communication ideas do not remain unchanged but are transformed in their absorption.

And then, if the basic principles of variation, selection and transmission are so much intertwined, does it then still work as evolution or have we then arrived at a different kind of process? In the next chapter I will discuss how communication can lead to new ideas.

To prevent any misunderstanding: I detract nothing from biological evolution or evolutionary psychology; and I also leave open the possibility that evolutionary logic applies to neural Darwinism.

# 6

## Language

In the previous chapter I proposed that mental structures of the subject arise in interaction with the physical and social environment on the basis of generative potential inherited from evolution. Social interaction to a large extent takes place on the basis of language. As indicated earlier, in human evolution language, conscious thought and social conduct co-evolved. The question now is how language works and how meaning arises and changes. Rather than mirroring reality, language creates conceptualizations of it. Something makes sense if we can express it in language. Language use is not simply expression of thought that precedes language. Cognition enables use of language but language use affects cognition. Language does not determine thought but does stimulate and order it.

Thinking without language is possible. Think of dreams, for example, which if we can recall them appear senseless when we try to tell them. They escape the categories of time, place, causality and logic. Think also of the moods, emotions and feelings that we express and understand not by means of language but by 'body language' in the posture or movement of the body and facial expression – which we can also express in language, though only very imperfectly.

According to the theory of a 'universal grammar' developed by Noam Chomsky there is an instinctive universal structure of grammar for everyone, as an outcome of evolution, which lies at the basis of all language (Pinker 1995).

Expressions in language can have 'propositional' content, can be 'about something', in the posing of a belief concerning the world, such as 'that is a chair'. According to the theory of 'speech acts' (Austin 1975; Searle 1969) people also use language 'to do things to each other'. Expressions can be 'illocutionary', i.e. directed at an addressee to create an effect in him or her: to attract attention; to influence an opinion; to coach into action with suggestions, directions, warnings, orders, threats, accusations, complaints, etc. 'That is a chair' can also be an admonition if someone is standing on it.

As shown by several authors (Hendriks-Jansen 1969; Sheets-Johnstone 2008; Hurford 2007) illocution precedes proposition and lies at its base.

Contact and attention precede communication. This applies to early language in the development of the individual and in the development of language in evolution, e.g. in some animals. Illocution remains present in propositions. Not all expressions have propositional content, but most expressions, including propositional ones, can be used with illocutionary force (Hurford 2007). 'That knife is not for use as a screwdriver,' my wife calls out. I know that, but that is not the point. My wife expresses annoyance at my ruining the knife. 'Doing things to each other' in communication can also arise without language, in 'body language', with posture, gesture, facial expression and the like that express fear, threat, etc. (see pp. 000–000).

As indicated, language is not needed for all forms of thought, but gives leverage to thought. It helps the development and use of universal concepts. In particular, it boosts thought by communication with others, by which one can tap from the differentiated mental constructions that others have made along their different life paths. As indicated earlier (see pp. 000–000), this is of fundamental importance for attempts to escape from our prejudices, preoccupations and perversities of the will. If thought is constructed on the basis of mental categories that depend on experience then, for a change of categories, we need to confront them with those of others with different experience and heritage: diversity is needed for learning. The use of such 'cognitive distance' as a source of learning and the economic importance of it is discussed in more detail in Nooteboom (2000, 2009).

Language is not, however, only a prop or tool but also an obstacle for thought. Conceptualization by means of language yields ontological prejudice, prejudice or bias concerning the arrangement of the world. It can lead us astray as for example Wittgenstein showed. This is one of the topics I want discuss further. A second topic is the classic problem of universals. How do they relate to the differentiated individual cases that 'fall under them'? What is the ontological status of universals? Do they exist? If so, in what sense? And how eternal or variable are they? The changeability of universals is of great importance because of the danger that they can lead to a totalitarianism in which the individual is discarded. We then arrive at a second, fundamental, ethical reason why interaction in diversity between people is indispensable, next to the reasons of cognition and learning that arose earlier.

Wittgenstein proposed (in his *Philosophical Investigations* and his *Blue and Brown Books*) that there could be no private language. For consistent reference language requires external criteria or evidence. If I have a feeling, for example that I am right, I cannot unfeel it. If I have a thought I cannot unthink it. If I have a will it is difficult to unwill it. If at one moment I use one term to refer to the stone I hit my foot upon and another moment I do not remember that experience and use another term, there is no basis by which to correct myself. I need someone else to point it out to me. We need others not just to correct our perceptions, interpretations and

rationalizations, but also to make sense. We need another, an interlocutor, to authenticate meaning and enable language. We need others, in mutual conversation and debate, to settle, test and shift meanings; and that applies in particular for moral categories of good and bad and for terms such as rationality, freedom, autonomy, human dignity and justice.

### Language as obstacle

In their book *Metaphors We Live by*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that apparently self-evident categories, even in what appears to be direct observation, are in fact metaphors rather than 'literal descriptions'. In fact, literal description does not exist.

We grasp our actions in the physical world, in which we have learned to survive, to construct meanings of abstract categories, starting with 'primary metaphors' that build on proprioception (groping, grasping) and bodily survival. Think of our own movement in the world, the speed and direction of the run of the sabre-toothed tiger, the shelter of a roof, a spear and its trajectory, the whereabouts of a lost child, the carrying of a burden. We would not have successfully evolved if we hadn't been reasonably accurate with such categories. This yields a certain basic conceptualization in our thought and language in terms of things (including actors) and their movement in time and space, the distinction between subject and object, and their action (including causal action).

This is reflected in Chomsky's universal grammar, where the basic elements of sentences are 'noun phrases' and 'verb phrases'. The basis for thought lies in things (including living things) that 'do' something. These 'things' form the paradigmatic nouns and the 'doing something' forms the paradigmatic verb. However, nouns also include abstract things like stories, political systems and grammars, and verbs include appearing, playing a role, conquering, loving, knowing, etc. Here the problems begin. A political system 'appears' in a different way from the appearance of an enemy at the gates, and 'appearance' may trigger an entirely inappropriate intuition.

I argue that we have what I call an 'object bias', an inescapable urge to approach everything as things that do something. The grammatical concepts of subject and object carry intuitive impressions of causal action while there may be no question of that. If we say 'John put his thoughts into words' we understand what is meant but at the same time the expression confirms the misleading intuition that words are containers of thoughts. Concepts that work well in our daily dealings with things do not automatically work well in our dealings with more abstract things. Use of language is not automatically adequate in talking about language. Below I will elaborate on this theme.

Realism and objectivity, with their claim that in our thought and language we reflect reality, are problematic since we cannot descend from our

minds to inspect how our knowledge is 'hooked onto the world'. Yet it is difficult to think without the presumption that such reality in some sense exists, even if we cannot know whether we know it well. Without reality the notion of evolution would be impossible, for example because it presupposes an environment that selects forms of life. My argument now is evolutionary: if in our daily activities, in dealing with things and their place and movement in space, our conceptualizations of them had not been reasonably adequate, then we would not have survived. But that does not apply, or much less, to our abstractions and categories at other levels.

The evolution of the human being and language of course goes beyond the stage of hunter-gatherers, though in a shorter time period – in more complex societies where next to objects in time and space, with their movement, operation and causalities with respect to those objects – symbolic actions, abstractions, emotions, metaphysics and rhetoric in thinking and language also came to play increasingly important roles. It is conceivable that the ability to shift to more adequate conceptualizations beyond object-based metaphors would have carried an evolutionary advantage. However, the basic structure of grammar, with the noun and verb phrases mentioned before, still rules. Perhaps the time was too short for an evolutionary shift, or gave insufficient evolutionary advantage, or the requisite shift was too far off from existing mental structures. This conceptual lack may jeopardize the survival of our species.

With primary metaphors we employ our experience with objects and use it to categorize. These are adequate for the things of daily life, in our efforts to survive. But categories at higher levels of abstraction are built on those basic primary metaphors – as higher-level metaphors. These have no independent basis in experience and are rooted in experience only indirectly, via the primary metaphors. Thus, for example, use of our muscles yields intuitions of causality.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) give a number of examples. Good is 'up', because we stand up when alive and well, while we are prostrate when ill or dead. We use spatial metaphors in many ways. Similarity is closeness. Purpose is destination. We are 'going ahead' with our work analogously to advance in motion. Time and change are intuited as motion in space. We make abstract notions in terms of containers, locations, movement, etc. Things to which a category applies are like objects in a container. They are either in or out. Fuzzy categories are as unsettling as leaking roofs and gaps in the wall that may yield entry to the sabre-toothed tiger. We see life as a journey. We are 'in' love or a hurry as if they were places. We draw conclusions as if they were a sword. In a fundamental and tenacious metaphor going back to Plato, knowledge is conceived as seeing, contemplation: the term 'theory' in its original meaning is such seeing. Intellectual grasp suggests the grasping of an object. Earlier in this book I had a problem with the notion of mental 'construction', which is misleading but difficult to

replace. A question is also whether our logic, with the notion of elements in a set and a disjunction or overlap of sets, is not an object-bound metaphor that imprisons us. Evolution as a phenomenon and as a logic was and in a number of areas still is difficult to accept because we do not encounter it in the street.

Earlier I voiced my objection to genetic determinism. What traits arise from genes depends on their *expression* as a function of the environment in which that takes place. The realization of some traits is more context-dependent than that of others. The colour of eyes does not depend on education, whereas the capacity for empathy does. Primary metaphors will vary less over cultures and social conditions than secondary ones, because material conditions for survival that form the basis for primary metaphors are more similar in laws of nature, mechanics, metabolism, physiology, etc. Secondary metaphors are more contingent upon social and cultural conditions.

Let there be no misunderstanding that metaphors are useful and unavoidable. What else would we use as a basis for categorization? And metaphors are also needed to change ideas and understanding. To clarify something that lies outside someone's thought we try to frame it using more familiar terms and something which constitutes a metaphor. Thus Heraclitus tried to clarify the impermanence of things with the famous metaphor that one cannot step into the same river twice. However, metaphors also yield 'epistemological obstacles' (to use the term from Gaston Bachelard 1980). 'The hidden hand of the unconscious uses metaphor to define unconscious metaphysics' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, p. 14).

I suspect that the primary metaphors, informed by experience with objects in the world, yield a misleading conceptualization of meanings, for example as objects. Since objects retain their identity when shifted in space, we find it difficult not to think of words retaining their meaning when shifted from sentence to sentence. Underlying this is the 'museum' metaphor of meaning – that words are labels of exhibits that constitute their meaning – and the 'pipeline' metaphor of communication – that with words meanings are shipped across a 'communication channel'. Meanings and communication are not like that, but we find it difficult to conceptualize them otherwise.

## Ontology

In short, we suffer from an *object bias*, using objects, their place and their containers for just about everything. The container metaphor also appears in the intuition that the nature of a thing or concept somehow lies in it: as an essence that forms its identity. National culture is somehow the essence of a nation.

The notion of identity suffers from the container metaphor. Identity too must have some essence that inheres in it. Your identity lies in one container, and you cannot have multiple identities any more than you can

be in two rooms at the same time. This becomes worse when the group is identified with some characteristic essence that determines membership of the group, such as a national spirit. Identification then inevitably is a demarcation between insiders and outsiders, and lacking the essence becomes a stigma. A better metaphor for identity is that of a network of positions, as in a family, a firm where one works, a profession, a society, a club, a neighbourhood, a hobby, etc. Thereby every identity is unique but overlaps in different ways with different others, without ever becoming identical. The notion of a subject or person suffers from the metaphor that this also is a container that contains knowledge and morality that can be poured into it or ladled from it.

We make an apparently obvious distinction between objects and events. And indeed it has survival value to see a car as an enduring entity that can move or stop as we cross the street. But behind every object there is a process. Objects are slow events. If we film a human being and play the film fast we see an ageing event. Stones are slower events than human beings, but in them also there is a procession of atoms. The distinction between objects and events is fundamental to our intuitions of ontology, and when it disappears ontology is at stake.

Perhaps it is better to see the human being and human relationships as a process or event rather than as an object. On the other hand, perhaps we should accord more relative stability to relationships and see them as things we can cherish. We could see constellations of relationships as fields of force, by analogy to magnetic fields or fields of gravity, rather than as collections of transactions between autonomous agents. With magnetic fields, when we make a move in the field it transforms the field. In relativity theory, gravity arises as a warping of space.

Levinas emphasized 'being' (*être*) as a verb, not as a noun. So did Heidegger and other existentialists. An event can be absorbed in others and thereby become immortal, in a sense, in quite another fashion than when there has to be a hereafter for preserving the soul as an object.

Much of our thought is in terms of space. Kant was right that the category of space is a condition for our thought that it is difficult to do without. But we use it in and out of season. We think of time and change as movement in space, and this goes back at least to Aristotle. Interestingly, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) report that this differs among different cultures. For some, we are moving towards the future, for others the future is moving towards us, and for yet others the future lies behind us (which is not so odd when you note that we see only the past). Movement in space implies that there is a destination and that we can see where it is going; while in innovation, evolution and history we can't. To deal with an unpredictable future is as frightening as not being able to predict the course of the sabre-toothed tiger. We haven't yet fully absorbed the notion of evolution as an alternative basis for the metaphorization of change.

Martin Heidegger and Henri Bergson tried to escape from this intuition with the notion of 'duration'. In contrast with a notion of time as a stream or a chain of events, not determined by the future and having no effect on the past, lived experience anticipates the future, and at each moment the past is reconstructed anew.

Earlier I mentioned the metaphor of knowledge as seeing. This implies, as the object of sight, a representation, i.e. a reality in terms of objects that present themselves to our sight. This arises from, and confirms, the metaphor of the object. One might also 'see' knowledge differently, pragmatically, as effective action in the world, as survival or as expression, not as seeing but as functioning, as know-how. This emerges in pragmatism and in Wittgenstein's notion of 'meaning as use'.

We often see thinking as positing, as if one puts a meal on the table. A fundamental idea gives a foundation, as of a house, on which you can stand firmly. On a swamp you cannot build. In thinking we 'establish' and 'confirm' even what we should see as loose and waiting to be set in motion. As discussed in Chapter 5, thinking is akin to, and based upon, feeling. Thinking is a bodily process – in which impressions are processed and mental impulses compete – which often expresses rather than posits, is driven rather than aimed. Thinking does not posit but shifts.

There is much more. We think of causality in terms of colliding objects and the manipulation of objects. Argumentation is often seen as fighting. Do we 'have' a body and thoughts in the same way that we have a car, which we can steer? In what sense do we 'have' access? Do we 'share' knowledge as we share food? Do we 'transfer' knowledge? There is too much to list.

In short, our ontology is a mess of, on the one hand, primary metaphors that are reasonably reliable because they are based on evolution, and on the other hand, secondary metaphors for non-daily, more abstract categories that are quite misleading. Seen in this way, the history of philosophy is one big, prolonged misunderstanding. In using language we are all, unbeknown to ourselves, metaphysicians.

Levinas (see pp. 000–000) strongly resisted ontology in general, especially as it was a threat to human ethics. Perhaps the preceding discussion throws some light on that. For example the idea that one 'grasps' or 'gets' people and tries to make their ideas 'tangible' can drive us towards possessiveness and manipulation that are ethically perverse. God is usually seen as part of ontology, as something existing that forms the basis of all else that exists (what Levinas called 'onto-theology'). Levinas (1993) tries to think beyond ontology, including the thought of God. I would say: he tries to escape from the object bias.

I am no longer sure what ontology is or should be. Of course it is about the 'furniture of the world'. But what do we encounter there? What about abstractions such as knowledge, meaning and feeling? Do they belong to the furniture or to its removal? Or is ontology the conceptualization of the world,

including abstractions, in terms of metaphors derived from and modelled after the objects in the world? Or does it require an escape from those misleading metaphors, in terms that are more *sui generis* for abstractions such as knowledge? I can see the distinction between ontology and ethics, and I can see the resistance to the imprisonment of being in a disconnected self, to being as the autarky, the self-sufficiency of the autonomous self, as emerges with Levinas. But if I now say that being is foremost a process, as Levinas and Heidegger said – a process of becoming, in interaction with the world, especially with other human beings – doesn't ethics then become part of ontology, or indeed the basis for it? This is the direction of Levinas's thought.

### Can we say no?

Can we wrench ourselves away from the prejudice of metaphorical concepts that ordinary language carries along? Can we 'say no' to them (to use the expression from Bachelard 1975)? In science, this has happened time and time again. The old idea of 'substance', wrapped up in our preoccupation with objects, has gone in chemistry through a radical transformation (*ibid.*). Where 'warmth' had hitherto been an attribute of a substance, it became the movement of particles. We learned to see matter and its attributes, and its composition and its change, as a configuration of electrically charged particles – and matter and energy turned out to be transformable into each other.

Many of us became familiar with atomic structure in terms of Niels Bohr's model by analogy to planetary systems: electrons circling the atom's nucleus like planets circling the sun. This model was later shown to be utterly wrong and was replaced by quantum physics that implies phenomena that seem completely foreign and magical, having no anchor in ordinary experience. It is a mystery that light consists of particles but at the same time is a wave phenomenon. In physics, mathematics has served to lift us out of metaphoric prejudice. But there is not one single mathematics: different forms of mathematics may serve different metaphorical points of departure, and so mathematics serves only to lift us from one metaphorical prejudice into another.

The turn from gravity as a force, in Newtonian physics, to gravity as a curvature of a space-time continuum, in general relativity theory, was enabled by the use of Riemannian geometry, but it entailed also the move from an object metaphor of things that have mass to a spatial metaphor of time being space (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). An advantage of this move was that it, in contrast with gravitational force theory, explained that light, without mass, also 'gravitates' to a large celestial object.

So, sometimes we can say no to an existing metaphor, but in doing so we say yes to a new one. Yet there is progress in that for some purposes some metaphors yield better explanations than others. Hannah Arendt (1958) deplored that modern science cannot be expressed and understood

in terms of ordinary language, so that speech and thought lose their power, contributing to a 'thoughtless society'. This presumes that existing language is somehow right; but in fact it is prejudiced by an object bias. Perhaps new science will help us to develop new categories which will help us to get away from epistemological obstacles in ordinary language.

This discussion shows how misleading primary metaphors can be, but also that we can sometimes escape from their grip, though that costs much effort and time. The examples came from natural science. Can we manage to escape also in the humanities and social/behavioural sciences? Can it also work without mathematics? We can play with metaphors. For a better grasp of ourselves, others and relationships we might experiment with deviations from the metaphors of objects, containers and location and movement in space. Perhaps we can see language and ourselves more as processes, while we can assign certain stability to processes such as relationships. Perhaps we can derive new metaphors from natural science. Perhaps there is something to be won with a metaphor of relationships as fields of force, in analogy to, say, magnetic fields, or fields of gravity, instead of as a set of transactions. In such a field the pattern of forces changes at the entry of a new magnetic object, or when a change in the curvature of space arises. Perhaps in analogy to light we can see a human being as both a particle, in the whole of a group or society, and a part of a wave. Earlier I indicated that we might see mental construction as a process of neural Darwinism, as Edelman did. Perhaps evolutionary logic should penetrate further as a metaphor for other processes of development.

Perhaps our search for firm and fixed foundations or 'grounds' (*archè* in classical Greek) is another delusion of metaphor. We want firm grounds for knowledge like we want firm ground under our feet. Anarchy, literally 'lack of ground', is as threatening as a morass or abyss. Popper said there are no rock-bottom facts that are empty of theory or interpretation, but nevertheless in many cases we can agree on them even from the perspective of opposing theories, because the theory in them is not evidently part of the theories we want to test. At some point the theory that is involved in facts will come under criticism, but in the meantime we can rely on the facts, if only for want of anything better.

There is a lesson in Wittgenstein's view, in his later work (*Philosophical Investigations* and the *Blue and Brown Books*), of language as a 'form of life'. An indeterminacy or openness of meaning is needed to allow for meaning change. To demand full clarity and strictness of meaning is like putting infants up to box with adults (as Feyerabend said somewhere). Fuzzy categories may be as unsettling as leaking houses, but fuzziness of existing categories is needed for the development of new ones. If there were absolute, universal, context-independent, necessary and sufficient conditions for something to belong to a given category, then we could never deviate from it and new categories could not arise. I have discussed the epistemological obstacles in

language. But language is a jewel as a form of life and may serve as a source of inspiration for a new logic or mathematics of ambiguity and change.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1979) made a distinction between the intersubjective order of language – at any moment ('synchronically') in *langue*, with given meanings – and individual, creative language use in time ('diachronically') in *parole* that breaks through the established order of meanings, as in poetry. Here again I anticipate my discussion of Levinas. In his later work (*Other than Being; Beyond Existence*) he attended to the opposition between the 'said' (*le dit*) at any moment and the diachronic 'saying' (*le dire*) that always goes beyond what is and can be said. We are often anchored and stuck in the first, but life and ethics lie in the second. I understand this as being related to Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*. Unfortunately, Saussure did not go beyond merely indicating *parole*, and offered no further analysis of how it works, limiting himself to an elaboration of the structure of the synchronic order of *langue*. Let us look more closely at *parole*. But for that we first require a discussion of the old problem of universals.

### Universals and individuals

We arrive at the old problem of universals, general concepts that form categories to which individuals, specific things, belong or are included. The concept 'chair' stands for the collection of all chairs. The Platonic idea is that such concepts, abstracted from their particular individual exemplars, exist in some ideal world, which is eternal and not subject to the chaos and variability of individuals. Contemplation of such universals is the ideal of knowledge. In Chapters 1 and 2, I indicated that universals have political implications in which the human being is sacrificed to the ideal in a totalitarian state. In politics and culture local ideas are soon lifted to the status of universals and forced upon others. Thus the discussion is not purely intellectual and has deep political implications. I am a *nominalist*, rejecting the existence of universals independently of our thought. Plato held that ideas are not the making of our thought but are given from outside. I hold that they are made up by thought and projected outside. Only individuals exist. This also is an old idea.

The enchantment of the abstract, to the neglect of individuals, is associated with the lure of mathematics, in particular the notion of a set. Philosophy has mostly been concerned with abstract universals. Literature, by contrast, is the art of the individual. In his *Pensées* (fragment 466) Blaise Pascal distinguished between the *esprit de géométrie* and the *esprit de finesse*. The spirit of geometry is difficult, at first, because it requires that we turn our attention away from the rich, complex and variable phenomena that present themselves to us, in the process of abstraction. But subsequently this becomes easy because of the analytical grip of logical inference from

# PROOF

*Language* 135

assumptions to implications, the proof from axioms to theorems. The spirit of finesse is easy at first since we rest our attention on the fullness of phenomena in the everyday world, but it then becomes difficult to reason correctly while maintaining the full flux and complexity of phenomena. The spirit of geometry we find especially in mathematics and physics, but also in economics, where economists are so proud of the little mathematics they have mastered that they see it as the whole world and discard finesse as 'unscientific' and lacking in rigour. The spirit of finesse we find in law, history and literature. The two spirits don't mix, yet we need both, and so we alternate between the two.

Another antique intuition, going back at least to Aristotle, is that a concept has an inherent ('immanent') essence. In contrast with the doctrines of Plato, according to Aristotle that essence does not have a separate existence, but it can be grasped and understood. Locke thought that essence can be found by abstraction, by deleting characteristics of a category until we reach the essential characteristics shared by all members of the category. Here appears the danger of de-individualization: only what is shared by all individuals counts. As discussed above, the notion of essence appears to be an example of the container metaphor: the category contains its essence. For example, national culture is the essence of a nation. Identity is essence and one cannot have more than one of them any more than one can be in two rooms at the same time.

In terms of logic the idea of essence is connected with the notion that there are necessary and sufficient conditions for belonging to a category. That intuition is tenacious. Indeterminacy is intuitively as threatening as not knowing whether the sabre-toothed tiger is inside or outside the cave. This tenacity may also be due to the fact that it mostly fits natural kinds (people, animals, plants) that were crucial to our survival in our evolution (Hurford 2007, p. 86). And indeed, one might say that biologically the genome is the essence of an organism. Essentialism can be a useful heuristic in assigning features to the sabre-toothed tiger that are essential for our survival, such as its speed, teeth and force. Whether the tiger is monogamous is less relevant when it stands before you. But this is makeshift, not a full representation or stand-in for individuals.

Johnson-Laird (1983, p. 196) made the reasonable comment that we should note that there are differences in the 'tightness' and nature of conditions for belonging to a class. Technical terms, as in mathematics, or legal terms often do indeed satisfy necessary and sufficient conditions to a large extent, because they were made on the basis of definitions in order to provide such rigour. Natural kinds have genomes. 'Constructive terms' on the other hand, such as a chair, have no underlying structure that determines their membership of the class. It is functional; it is what we make of it. Is a seat without legs a chair? Once I saw a photo in the newspaper under the heading 'See him sitting in his cow'. a stuffed cow with a dent in it served as a chair.

Problems with universals don't prove that they don't make sense or are to be rejected. We could not do without them. If we could not generalize from the specific, and only had a grasp of individuals, we would be incapacitated in our ability to predict, infer and gain an insight into causalities. Experience with one sabre-toothed tiger would not help in dealing with a different one. Even animals have capabilities of generalization.

Without universals, rules and justice would be impossible. Yet we are left with on the one hand a universal rule of law, equal for all, and on the other hand relevant specific conditions that matter and which the law does not cover. We need judges to take special conditions into account. We want to distinguish between on the one hand a universality of rights and claims for a humane life and on the other hand the specificity of conditions by which people do not have access to the required resources and to ways of realizing a minimum of justice. I am thinking here of minimal 'capabilities' (see pp. 00–00) – to which according to Nussbaum (2006) people should have access – and the diverse ways in which the handicapped of all kinds do not have access, and the ways to remedy this.

### Sense and reference

For further analysis, let me employ some fundamental notions from the theory of language and meaning. There is in linguistics a distinction between 'semantics' and 'pragmatics'. In semantics one tries to arrive at conditions of truth in propositions, regardless of the specific context of action. In pragmatics precisely the latter is central. According to my views, the separation of semantics from pragmatics is an illusion.

Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) made the distinction between 'reference' (*Bedeutung*, denotation, extension) and 'sense' (*Sinn*, connotation, intension) (Frege 1892; see also Geach and Black 1977; Thiel 1965). I employ this distinction, though not quite in the way Frege intended. Reference is that to which an expression refers, or what it denotes, as 'chair' refers to the class of all chairs. This reference is not objective – there is no mirroring – but it is intentional: with 'chair' we aim to refer to chairs as we see them and have conceptualized them. Sense is characterized by Frege (1892, p. 26) as 'the manner in which reference is given' (*die Art des Gegebenseins*). The usual interpretation of that is 'manner of representation'. The classic example is that of the planet Venus that shows itself in the morning (as 'the morning star') as well as in the evening ('the evening star'). It was thought once that there were two different 'stars', but they are different presentations of one object. I interpret sense also as 'a method of identification or verification', the way in which we recognize something as belonging to a certain class, or as true or false. One can identify Venus as an object in the evening as well as an object in the morning. The name 'Aristotle' and the expression 'the teacher of Alexander the Great' have the same reference but a different sense.

Sense helps in the process of the spreading of shared denotation to arrive at identification or categorization in new ways. By showing how something can be recognized as belonging to a concept one can contribute to the spread of the concept. Sense gives the connection between the universal and the individuals that belong to it. It connects knowledge with perception, specifies the way in which words are understood and meaning is established, and the way in which reference affects our cognition. In that, language is a system, in the sense that change of the meaning of one word has repercussions in the meaning shifts of other words.<sup>1</sup> When we accept an unusual denotation, so that the extension of a concept shifts, then this has repercussions for the intension of the word, the things we think of when we use the word, and that affects the way in which we think of other things and thereby also the intensions of those other things.

One of the uses to which the sense/reference distinction was put was an attempt to understand sameness of meaning (synonymy). One criterion (going back to Leibniz) for that was 'substitution while saving truth': two words have the same meaning if in any proposition they can substitute for each other without affecting the truth of the proposition. Sameness of denotation then does not work. Take, for example, the sentence: 'What if Aristotle had never taught Alexander the Great'. Here we cannot replace 'Aristotle' by 'the man who taught Alexander the Great'. It does not work either in so-called 'modal' contexts of belief or necessity. Take 'the reader of this book believes that Aristotle was a Greek philosopher'. Before reading this book some readers may not have known that Aristotle taught Alexander and so we could not have made the replacement. Replacement also does not work in 'Aristotle necessarily taught Alexander'. He might well not have done so. Sameness of sense performs better, because it includes the way in which denotation is determined.

In communication a 'receiver' tries to assimilate an expression into the system of concepts and corresponding intensions that form his or her 'absorptive capacity'. In that process intensions that are attributed to the concept, and connections with those of other concepts, will never be identical to those of the 'sender'.<sup>2</sup> Thus assimilation is always creative and transformative and communication never entails identity of intensions of sender and receiver. Therein lies the creativity of communication. Different individuals may have different ways of identifying a given object as belonging to some class.

Individuals can also change, and new individuals may appear that should but don't fit a given category. The concept of 'swan' once carried the 'essential' characteristic of being white until black swans were discovered in Australia.

If extension, categorization and truth depend on intension, on how class membership or truth is determined, then semantics is inherently pragmatic.

### Pragmatics

Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his later work (*Philosophical Investigations*), recognized that often there are no necessary and sufficient conditions for categorization and proposed that the criteria for establishing truth, or validity in any other sense, or adequacy, is a matter of what works and to what conventions we agree with each other in what he called 'language games'. This is the notion of 'meaning as use', in which a concept is seen as an instrument. From an instrument we do not require that it be true or that we know what the necessary and sufficient conditions for its categorization or use are. Adequacy depends on a specific use in a specific context. This is open-ended and leaves room for unorthodox but effective use, as when using, if necessary, a screwdriver as a hammer.

Austin (1975) and Searle (1969) introduced another aspect of meaning, in the theory of 'speech acts'. As indicated earlier, expressions may be intended not so much, or not only, to inform as to exert influence: in 'illocution'.

Semanticists object that the notion of meaning as use is affected by countless cultural, social, psychological and other factors that have little to do with meaning (Katz 1982). Any word can be used for illocution, in irony, invective, stereotyping, etc. But such dependence on context is precisely what I am interested in. Again, let me recall the ethical stakes involved in this. Not to fall into totalitarianism we must in our notion of meaning not lose individuals from sight.

How, then, does pragmatics work? How can we handle the necessary universals without essence or necessary and sufficient conditions for categorization and without losing individuals from sight? Several proposals have been made for this.

Putnam (1975) proposed a 'linguistic division of labour', where specialists know the 'real' meaning, such as the chemical composition of water (H<sub>2</sub>O). Ordinary people can refer to them in case of doubt, but for everyday activity they use what Putnam recognized as a 'stereotype', such as water being clear, potable, boiling at 100°C, freezing at 0°C, subject to expansion when freezing (causing water ducts to burst), etc. In fact these features do not always apply: under pressure the boiling point is higher and the freezing point is lower. At greater heights pressure is lower, hence the boiling point is lower, and this can even be used to determine the height of a mountain. One goes beyond the stereotype when conditions require it. However, specialists can also be wrong, and new scientific discoveries can shift 'real' meaning, even though that seems unlikely before it happens.

Johnson-Laird (1983, p. 189) used Minsky's (1975) notion of 'default' to clarify how conventional criteria for meaning could work. In a default, features are assumed until there is contrary evidence. This again fits well with philosophical pragmatism: we assume something as given until we run into misfits or novel openings. In other words: all ideas are defaults.

Wittgenstein offered the idea of 'typical cases' that form a norm and one handles boundary cases in comparison to the norm. Different individual cases of a universal may not have any universally shared feature other than being members of a chain of family resemblance. Proximate members of a family have common features while distant members don't. X is in the same class as Y, not because they have some feature in common but because there is an intermediate Z that has one feature in common with X and another with Y.

Rosch (1977, 1978) proposed the idea of a 'prototype', which is a salient exemplar of a class that connects others in that class. Class membership is decided on the basis of resemblance to a salient case, or a typical case, which serves as a prototype. The prototype, being a salient case, depends on culture and natural conditions. For example, for the Dutch the prototype of a bird is a sparrow, and for the British it is a robin. The idea goes back to the ancient notion of a paradigm, used by Socrates, as an exemplary case to mimic.

Shank and Abelson (1977) gave further content and structure to concepts in terms of scripts, which cover a wide range of action-oriented concepts. A script is a structure of slots for component activities plus requirements about what can fill those slots. The links between components represent causal influence and relations of dependence, but they can also be relations of causal implication or condition (if ... then, unless, provided that ...) or temporal succession. Thus a script can also be the representation of a theory derived by means of 'mental mapping'. Thompson (1967) indicated three forms of dependence: sequential (A follows B), pooled (A and B share an input or an output C) and reciprocal (A and B affect each other).

The example Shank and Abelson use is the restaurant script, with component activities of entry, seating, ordering, eating, paying and leaving. The meaning of 'restaurant' shifted under the invention of self-service restaurants, with a different ordering and different content of component activities. The overall script forms the 'background' against which component activities make sense or not, or make one sense rather than another.

In my view, consistent with the pragmatic perspective, meaning is context-dependent in 'situated action'. The script notion is useful for a clarification of context dependence and the notion of the 'background' against which expressions make sense or not and acquire one sense or another. The notion of 'interpretative background' appears also in Searle (1992). Interpretation of texts or pictures is based, to some extent, on unspecified, and incompletely specifiable, assumptions triggered in situated action. When in a restaurant one asks for a steak, it is taken for granted that it will not be delivered at home and will not be stuffed into one's pockets or ears. The notion of such a background, and of a script, is also found in Hurford's (2007) idea that local elements of a situation are perceived and interpreted in terms of the global sense of the situation. We watch a soccer game and judge what it means if someone touches the ball with his hand in that setting, in contrast

with rugby. There is also a relation with the notions of 'mental framing' and 'priming' in social psychology. We see the touching of the ball differently depending on whether the setting is basketball or soccer. A mental frame is a cognitive frame in terms of which one interprets behaviour (in relational signals) and which triggers a response in terms of a standard action sequence. Waiting to be served does not work in self-service restaurants.

As one observes an action, this may trigger in the mind the notion of a full script in which the action makes sense, upon which the entire script, with its customary intentions, is attributed to the observed agent. When one sits down in a service restaurant this hopefully triggers a waiter to serve, but when one sits on the floor one may be asked to leave the premises.

Attribution of entire scripts facilitates fast inference under incomplete information and as such contributes to survival under threat and the need for quick action. However, it also makes for prejudice: one can attribute an inappropriate script and attendant intentions. People try to absorb the utterances or actions of others by trying to insert them into a familiar script and to use that to ascribe intentions and competencies to those others. When no fitting script can be found the action tends to be ignored, mistrusted, rejected, condemned or simply not perceived. Scripts may operate as the proverbial beds of Procrustes who cut visitors down to the size of his bed or stretched them to it. We interpret acts falsely in terms of what we know. To understand others we need to become familiar with the scripts they enact.

The problem with criticizing one's scripts is that they are often 'tacit' (Polanyi 1962, 1966, 1969), i.e. cannot be articulated and are taken for granted or even lie below the radar of possible awareness. To be subject to criticism they must, if at all possible, be made explicit. For this one may use the help from others in 'maieutics', i.e. intellectual midwifery. Socrates was a master at it, letting people argue for their tacit prejudices until they see them for what they are revealed to be. For lesser masters than Socrates a way to do it is to get together with people with similar but not identical experience and practice and coach a mutual elucidation of tacit scripts by having them compare their practices and map the differences. Here we are back at the central theme of this book: the role of the other in the thinking and doing of the self.

Perhaps it is useful to also use the notion of a script as a model of culture as a field of activities. Earlier I proposed seeing identity as a network of positions that one can take. The link between identity and culture now is that the positions that form part of an identity are nodes of cultural scripts. The positions one takes determine the roles one plays in those scripts. This also gives a grasp on the different levels of culture, discussed in Chapter 1, since a script has subscripts and superscripts. In the example of the restaurant script the component activities of paying, for example, in its turn consists of different alternative subscripts (cash, debit card, credit card, cheque). The restaurant is embedded in wider scripts of the built environment, traffic and

parking, opening times, licences, etc. Thus a person with his or her identity associated with positions in local social connections is also connected with higher levels of scripts at national and international levels. The notion of a script elaborates on the embeddedness of identity.

### The evolution of language

Let us now look more closely at the dynamics of language and meaning. How did they emerge, how are they learned and how do they change?

First, development in evolution. In all likelihood language and meaning as both reference and sense started from pure illocution. Cries for attention in the avoidance of danger and the searching for food acquired a loading of 'aboutness', to some extent already in some animals (Hurford 2007). In primitive conditions of survival in evolution, warning was combined with pointing to a source of danger, or location of a prey, which developed into reference. According to Hurford (2007) some animals already have the ability to categorize objects (such as forms of food and forms of threat, such as 'eagle' and 'leopard' for a certain type of monkey) and to make predicative statements combining such categories – e.g. pointing and indicating 'eagle there'. Hurford also noted that without any such early start of meaning-like abilities the evolutionary leap from animals to humans and from absence to presence of language would be a bit too big.

In evolution we made great strides in the development of cognition by grasping the notion of objects having an existence independently of our observation. In the ontogenetic development of babies that discovery is made anew each time (see the work of the developmental psychologist Jean Piaget). From object permanence we moved on to prospective object permanence, expecting to see something where it was last seen or extrapolating movement to expect an object to appear further along its trajectory. Only when at a certain stage of development will a child, when you roll a ball behind a sofa, look at the other end in the firm expectation to see the ball appear there. Categorization required integration of multiple senses: sight, smell and touch. That is why objects, with their feel, sight and smell, have a powerful grip on our cognitive system. We feel the weight and furry softness and the twitching muscles of the cat we try to hold, which we associate with the vision of its leaps. Sensory and motor information (from lifting, pushing and pulling) are combined in the categorization of objects. This yields a fundamentally action-based form of categorization. In evolution this categorization precedes language and feeds into it. Animals already have bundles of integrated sense and motor experience, and in language people started to apply labels to them.

We learned to distinguish the movement of living things, from which we grasped the notion of agency and more (Hurford 2007). We categorize cats on the basis of a combination of features, such as the litheness of its

movements, the stretch of its jump, its crouching and mu muttering as it stalks a bird, thus building up a sense of cats for the basis of future reference. With words we can recreate experience in the absence of the underlying stimuli. This is the realm of the 'middle level' mentioned before. All this is deeply embedded in our cognitive potential, starting with primary metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) proposed that the construction of mental categories is heavily based on proprioception (motor activities of touch and handling) in learning to survive in an environment of opportunities, threats, pursuit, flight, food, obstacles, shelter, instruments, etc.

The integration of sensory and motor information in categorization entails that our categorization of objects is connected with our handling of them. According to Millikan (2004) it entails that mental states can have a dual function of reflecting states of affairs (*indicative* function) and of affecting them (*imperative* function). The squeal of an infant indicates hunger and commands feeding. Sensory-motor integration also yields 'mirror neurons' where the observation of another's action produces corresponding representations, and its triggering of action, in the observer. We open our mouths when observing others eat. We mirror not only actions but also emotions, even when we do not observe them but imagine or hear about them. This yields a neurological basis for empathy (Hurford 2007). This again touches upon the central theme of this book.

As demonstrated by Sheets-Johnstone, as discussed earlier, much of how a child learns to make sense of the world and of other beings arises from a sense of movement (kinaesthetic) of its body in relation to objects and other bodies in 'rough and tumble play'. It has become second nature to us to such an extent that we are not aware of it as we read the properties of objects and the motives, goals, moods and emotions of people in close association with how they move. We make sense of people on the basis of our own bodily experience that we ascribe to them. If we stick to the definition of sense as the way in which things are given to us, and how we identify them, then sense is thoroughly embodied. This precedes language, in both evolution and personal development, but it remains in force in language use: 'however covered in words, movement remains the bedrock of language as it remains the bedrock of behaviour' (Sheets-Johnstone 2008, p. 214). In short, concept and sense making, and thereby rationality, are anchored in bodily movement. Bodily sensing precedes language and remains the basis for the acquisition and use of language.

There is a co-evolution of language and social structures. Social structure enables language (see Wittgenstein's argument that there can be no private language, p. 000), and the increasing complexity of social structure requires and stimulates an increasing complexity of communication (Hurford 2007).

After this discussion of the development and the acquisition of language and meaning, I will now give a further analysis of how, in language use between people, meaning changes. Earlier I indicated the notion of *parole*,

taken from de Saussure: the living, spoken word makes meaning change.  
Can we say more about that?

### Change of meaning

In hermeneutics (the theory of interpretation), largely ascribed to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), there is the notion of a ‘hermeneutic circle’ with a ‘paradigmatic’ and, perpendicular to that, a ‘syntagmatic axis’ (Gadamer 1977). ‘Paradigm’ refers to concepts with their existing meanings and ‘syntagma’ refers to the expression in which words are used. The meaning of an expression depends on the meaning of the words in it (as Frege proposed), but also the meaning of a word depends on the sentence and on the wider context in which that is used, and in the insertion of words into sentences, in the context of some actions, meanings of the corresponding concepts (paradigms) can shift. Again I use the metaphor of finding out that a screwdriver may be used as a hammer. In terms of denotation/extension and connotation/sense: with an existing repertoire of connotations (paradigm) we identify objects in specific circumstances (syntagma) and where that does not work this gives occasion for a shift of the repertoire of connotations. In other words: as we use words, new associations may arise.

There is some indication that paradigm and syntagma arise in different parts of the brain. It is tricky to locate precisely the functions in the brain. It does not matter so much where they are located as long as the connections fit, with regard to language as a network phenomenon. Yet there is an indication that sentence construction and verbs, which are closely connected, are located in a certain region of the brain (the Broca region), and that nouns, mostly referring to objects with their spatial forms and other mostly visual characteristics, are located in a different region (the Wernicke region) (Pinker 1995).

We can state this in a different way. Universals, saved in *semantic memory*, arise in abstraction from specific individuals in their specific circumstances that are saved in *episodic memory*. Thereby concepts can be lifted from a certain context and placed into new contexts. That helps us to deal with new contexts (the sabre-toothed tiger that now slinks through the marsh). That placement into new contexts may show up novelty (the tiger turns out to also be able to swim), which shifts the general concept.

Generalization/abstraction has several functions. One is the reduction of complex constellations of properties to the simple, most characteristic or salient, and most relevant characteristics (for certain purposes), which helps for an economy of thought and speed of interpretation and action. A second function is to free us from specific circumstances in which nothing new happens and to step into new circumstances where we can still learn. Here universals serve as stepping-stones on which we stand but from which we can also push off towards novelty. We use a universal to try and fit, in

a new situation, an unknown phenomenon into a known concept, which was derived and abstracted from earlier experience. This also is a matter of economy of thought and speed of inference. But if the novelty cannot effectively be fitted in there is an opportunity and a need to shift the universal.

This process, and the hermeneutic circle, is equivalent to 'scientific method' in which, from application and experience in different contexts of application, we arrive at ideas for new theory that is then applied and tested anew. In my view that, not deduction from indubitable principles, is the crux of science.

This brings us back to the cycle of discovery, discussed in Chapter 5. This aims to offer a further logic of change of knowledge, practice, technology, product, etc. Does the cycle now also apply to change of meaning? Does it offer an elaboration of the hermeneutic circle or an alternative to it? And vice versa: can the present linguistic analysis contribute to further understanding of the cycle of discovery? It would be strange if such connections did not obtain, since change of knowledge and of meaning must somehow be connected.

The connection is clear. Both the hermeneutic circle and the cycle of discovery indicate that change of content (meaning, knowledge) arises because the known content is applied to new contexts and, by adaptation to them, yields new content. The cycle adds a few things. Initial new content is ambiguous, diffuse and ill ordered, with gaps, overlaps, incongruities or outright contradictions. In the course of experimentation more order arises, with a more coherent structure, streamlined by the elimination of superfluous or incidental elements in a process of consolidation. The novelty is reduced to 'essentials', which is economic because it yields simplification. This is the process of abstraction, the construction of universals. The loosening from situational peculiarities makes it possible to shift what is learned to a new context by way of *generalization*. The cycle shows that adaptation to a new context can happen in a 'proximate' fashion by selecting different elements from an existing repertoire, in *differentiation*, and in a more 'distant' fashion by borrowing elements of connotation from foreign concepts in the new context that help the old concept to work better, in *reciprocation*. Can this help us to understand the workings of *parole*? In terms of the hermeneutic circle: in differentiation we replace a *paradigm* with another, in a given *syntagma*, while in reciprocation we craft a new paradigm.

It is characteristic of literature to work in this fashion, in a 'de- and re-contextualisation of known elements of experience', in a 'negation of generally accepted assumptions about reality'. It does this by 'the offer to the reader to assume imaginary roles, or at least to try them out as a matter of play' (Reckwitz 2009, pp. 179, 181, 182). Literature uses individuality for a confusion, deconstruction and reconstruction of universals, by forcing upon them the richness of specific people in their specific lives in specific circumstances and thereby the universals come to life, fall apart

# PROOF

*Language* 145

and recompose in a new view of life. As Barthes (1978, p. 12) said: 'science is coarse, life is subtle, and it is in bridging this gap that the importance of literature lies'. Here we recognize again Pascal's distinction between the spirit of geometry and the spirit of finesse. As a result, literature is both a tool against the suppression of life by universals and a tool for the renewal of universals. It is an important tool for otherhumanism, as I will argue in Chapter 10.

Conversely, in an attempt to use insights from language for clarification of the cycle, I have applied the script notion from the analysis of language in an attempt to specify and develop further the cycle of discovery (Nootboom 2000). As indicated earlier, a script can refer to a practice with component activities. It can also be a sentence with words as nodes in the script, a theory as a deductive system of axioms and theorems, or a concept as a structure of partial concepts. In terms of scripts generalization is the application in a new situation of an existing script. Differentiation is a different execution of an activity in the node of the script, tapping an existing repertoire for that node. Reciprocation is the insertion into the repertoire of a node, or insertion of a whole node (with its entire repertoire), taken from a foreign script, with its repertoire of ways to fulfil the function of an old node or to replace it with a new function found in the new context, or, vice versa, to insert a node from one's old script into a script found there. Accommodation is experimentation with new configurations of nodes from old and new scripts in the exploration of a new script. Consolidation is finding the most effective and efficient form and its streamlining by cutting superfluous branches from a script or optimizing the repertoires of nodes. In its discovery, in the exploring of new ideas, science is like literature.

## 7

## Nietzsche: The Flourishing of Life

The importance of Nietzsche for this book lies in his fiery plea for an affirmation of life as the flourishing of the creative and intelligent forces of the human being. That greatly appeals to me. If the human being is irremediably mortal, let him or her then fully employ, for the time one is given, the miracle of the potential one has for thought, feeling, learning and creation. A related idea is found in Heidegger (in his *Being and Time*) with his notion of 'being unto death' (*Sein zum Tode*) from which I make (perhaps against Heidegger's intention) that in the face of death one should live to the full of one's potential.

According to Levinas such fullness of experience in life can lead to fascist heroics in a rush of violence, regardless of the suffering of its victims, and indeed fascists have appropriated Nietzschean rhetoric (and some of Heidegger's ideas) for their purpose. However, before I turn to Levinas's philosophy of the other for a plea for benevolence, I want to consider the risks of such benevolence insofar as it involves self-sacrifice and the suppression of life forces. The question will concern how we can arrive at benevolence and responsibility for the other without thwarting the flourishing of life. My conclusion will be that Nietzsche cannot achieve his aim in the way he tries, from within the self, and that for the flourishing of the self a higher level of freedom is required in an opening to the other. Thus I first go along with Nietzsche and then conclude in opposition against him.

I begin with a discussion of the positions that Nietzsche takes. This is tricky because over time his positions develop and partly contradict each other. It is risky to try and expound Nietzsche briefly, and so I will not try to do that in full. Here I draw out what is relevant for this book. First I will mention some problems in the reading of his works.

Next to Nietzsche's position concerning morality and the flourishing of life, his thought also relates to this book in other ways. In his view of cognition he was a precursor of pragmatism, which on the whole I adopt, with his view that there are no absolute truths and that our ideas serve as useful fictions that help us to pursue our goals and to survive in the

world. Connected with that I share with him his dynamic perspective of cognition: the notion that ideas are always temporary and are adapted in the practice of action. In his psychological insights Nietzsche was a precursor of current insights in neuroscience – that cognition is rooted in the physiology of the body and brain – and of social psychology – that our cognition, in the wide sense of mental activity, is largely unconscious and formed and driven by unconscious impulses and instincts, and that reasons for actions are often rationalizations post hoc. Nietzsche offered an almost uncanny foresight of neural Darwinism (see pp. 000–000). In *Morgenröte* [*Daybreak*] (2008 [1886], fragment 119) he describes the development of drives as follows: ‘every moment of our life lets some polyp-arms of our being grow and others wither’. Compare ‘polyp-arms’ to the axons of neurons that extend or shrink on the occasion of experience. In fact some of these insights go back further to Spinoza.

Next, with Nietzsche (and Kierkegaard) I share the striving for recognition of the individual and the specific, and the resistance to their dissolution in universals and abstractions, although I recognize the indispensability of universals and abstractions, as indicated in Chapter 6, where I discussed how the individual/concrete and the universal/ abstract are related to each other in a dynamic of learning and change of meaning in language.

### Understanding Nietzsche

As I say I am not attempting a full ‘explanation’ or exegesis of Nietzsche. I am dealing with a specific problem, of benevolence, altruism, empathy and trust, for which the work of Nietzsche is both a challenge and a source. I often refer to ‘Nietzsche’ rather than ‘the work of Nietzsche’ to express the spirit in which I read his work: as if in dialogue with him, developing opinions on some parts of his work and then trying to find his rejoinder elsewhere. I mainly make use of his own work, in German, and use the secondary literature about Nietzsche only sparingly, though to test my interpretation of Nietzsche I compare it to that of at least one other reading (Kaufmann 1968; Nehamas 1985; Safranski 2000; Janaway 2007).

It is widely agreed among Nietzsche scholars that this reading is problematic (see e.g. Kaufmann 1968). Nietzsche is full of paradox and sometimes even seems to contradict himself outright, not only across but even within books, and indeed he says himself that one should allow oneself to change meanings and opinions ‘as one does one’s clothes’. Nietzsche is wary of philosophical systems that build upon premises that are taken for granted, and he goes around in circles, making assumptions experimentally and then going back to question them.

Thus he develops his thought not in the form of an ongoing argument but in a concatenation of aphorisms that overlap and return in a variety of guises. The way in which this is done is excessive and methodologically

dubious, because as a moving target his argument becomes difficult to criticize, while Nietzsche professes to find criticism important. Yet I find this fine and also in agreement with what I see as one of the core elements of his overall argument: the urge to learn without end, assume nothing as fixed and submit everything to debate. Whether this can explain or justify all the paradox and contradiction in his work is another matter, but the question is whether that is always a must, without any residue. A restless search for Nietzsche is worth more than the closure of an argument that leaves nothing unaccounted for.

Let me give an example. Nietzsche repeatedly condemns asceticism, self-denial, repression of emotions and arid scientism, and pleads for an opening up to the forces of life, drives, impulses and instincts of intuition and expression in a 'Dionysian' release of life forces, while elsewhere he repeatedly pleads for the cool, reserved, restrained, detached, hyper-critical and intellectual discipline of the scientist (in *Human All Too Human*, 2006 [1886]). He both extols art and condemns it as illusory. There may be no outright contradiction in this, but one does wonder when the one applies and when the other does. Or is this just a matter of different moods expressing themselves with little rhyme or reason, and deliberately so? In the course of this book I will give more examples of Nietzschean paradox. One question concerns how consistent Nietzsche wants to be.

Truth in any strict sense is a chimera anyway, in Nietzsche's view. Yet he strives for truth in some sense, in the seeking rather than the achieving of it, at the expense even of everything else, setting no limit to the assumptions or premises that can be criticized. He despises people who take received ideas for granted and do not search for deeper insights, who do not question without end; but he renounces the pretence of having achieved ultimate, indubitable foundations. He expects his readers to think for themselves and make up their own minds from what he throws at them. This is what I do in this book, and with pleasure.

The ambiguity of Nietzsche partly lies in the differences between the stages in the development of his thought. Generally, in the literature three stages are recognized (Copleston 1962, vol. 7, part II, pp. 165–8). There is the first period, before his break with Wagner and his turning away from Schopenhauer, with the focus on aesthetic experience and artistic genius, and, in his *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), the contrast between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. There is the second period with the almost positivistic orientation towards scientific criticism and insights in *Human All Too Human* (1878). There, the will to knowledge supersedes his previous preoccupation with the will to art and myth (Safranski 2000, p. 152). There is the third and most influential period with his attack on Christian morality, the central idea of the will to power, the flourishing of life, the creative destruction by lofty individuals, the 'overman' (Übermensch) and the eternal recurrence, described in *Daybreak* (1881), *Genealogy of Morality* (1887), *Gay Science*

(1881), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885). His later *Ecce Homo* (1908) is seen by some as an expression or harbinger of his ultimate mental collapse. The discontinuities across these periods can be exaggerated. In his later thought the earlier Dionysus reappears, albeit in a different sense. Now he maintains the critical, searching spirit and the psychology of his middle period.

While in his middle period (especially in *Human All Too Human*) he took a positivist attitude and a cool, distant, dispassionate analysis of the realities of human psychology. In his later work (e.g. in the *Towards the Genealogy of Morality*) he propounded that scientific analysis cannot do without feelings, certainly not in the analysis of morality. How does this relate to the usual ideal of science as dispassionate, sober and distant? In Nietzsche's opinion these qualities lead to a self-denial that he wants to eliminate. According to him feelings are not only inevitable in science and philosophy, but also useful, because they are part of knowledge (cf. Janaway 2007, p. 212).

I have no problem with this. Emotions, feelings and passions lead many of our actions, intuitions and motives, giving direction to our searching and setting agendas. Knowledge and language utilize fundamental notions, intuitions, instincts and metaphors that are partly inherited from evolution and are shot through with feelings and emotions that go along with the struggle for survival. Nothing of this, however, implies that we must set aside arguments and replace them with emotions, even though they help us to produce and understand arguments. In the literature on philosophy of science a distinction is made between the 'context of discovery', where intuitions, empathy and feelings play a central role, and the 'context of justification', where arguments and inference count. While the first helps to grasp the second, it is the second that counts in debate. While Nietzsche saw the need to break through moral prejudice with the full force of rhetoric, we must now, more than one hundred years later, go for arguments.

Nietzsche surges ahead with torrents of extreme claims, exhortations and abuse and then, in smaller eddies and more tranquil side waters of this maelstrom, in more sober reflection, qualifies them or even seems to retract them. We should make allowances for the fact that on a number of points Nietzsche was far ahead of his time and aimed for a wider audience than only philosophers, especially younger searching souls, and for this he required an attention-grabbing rhetoric.

Despite its difficulty, reading Nietzsche's work is well worth the effort for his passionate affirmation of life, his creative force, his daring to depart from settled views and categories, his sharp insights into human psychology, his path breaking views on cognition and language, and the poetic force of his language (though a little too hyperbolic to my taste). It is certainly exhilarating and enlightening to scholars of innovation and learning (like me). In his creative destruction Nietzsche was to philosophy what Schumpeter was to economics. Inspiring also is Nietzsche's genealogical approach, where he

tests ideas and morality, and their prejudices, in the context of the logic of the evolution and development of mankind (critical though he was of Darwinism). Nietzsche is inspiring also in his acceptance, even celebration, in making it heroic, of the loneliness that befalls the heretic.

Inspiring but also distractive is the form of presentation he often chose: bursts of brief observations, diatribe, claims, exhortations and aphorisms, in simple, easy to understand German (after one has struggled to exhaustion with the likes of Kant, Hegel, Habermas and Adorno), with supple turns of phrase that dance to a literary tune. While this contributes to difficulties of interpretation, this is not so much a difficulty of understanding what is written as a difficulty of establishing the precise claim of what is being said, of tracing the underlying arguments that often keep lurking in the shade or are absent altogether, and of establishing coherence or the lack of it with what is said elsewhere. But this also contributes not only to the liveliness, the pleasure and irritation of the discourse, but also to its intrigue and its pressure to think for oneself in the effort of tracking his thought and trying to pin him down.

In his work words change or oscillate their meanings. For example, the German word '*böse*' appears to mean different things at different times. In ordinary usage it is already an ambiguous term, possibly meaning angry or irate, but also bad or evil. In English it tends to be translated as 'evil', as opposed to 'good'. In Nietzsche's work it does sometimes appear to mean evil, but sometimes also upsetting or unsettling thought, or depth, unorthodoxy or radical novelty of thought. As an economist one is constantly reminded of Schumpeter's notion of 'creative destruction'. Perhaps that term best captures Nietzsche's overall sense of the term.

'Will to power'<sup>1</sup> sometimes means literally will to power in the everyday sense of domination and suppression; sometimes it means less ominous forms of supremacy or superiority over others; at other times it means a drive towards self-manifestation, self-realization or expression more neutrally, sometimes towards self-overcoming.<sup>2</sup> These meanings are not necessarily inconsistent. Overall, will to power can be characterized as the drive to extend one's sphere of influence as far as it will go. Nietzsche sees self-overcoming as self-realization made dynamic, and I agree. The will to power can be put to lower and to higher purpose, and the lower can be sublimated into the higher, by self-overcoming, with the highest purpose and highest level of self-overcoming being the relentless questioning of assumptions. Honesty, intellectual inquiry and philosophy are a sublimation of cruelty (Nehamas 1985, p. 218): a Dionysian will to create, which has transcended unreflected drives (Safranski 2000). A key question then is how this self-overcoming is to be done: how can the will to power of an individual turn upon itself to transcend itself (Kaufmann 1968, pp. 219–23)? I will argue that such bootstrapping is very difficult if not impossible, and to overcome him or herself the individual needs an external force, or is greatly aided by it, in the response and challenge from others.

So, in spite of all the apparent chaos of aphorisms and revisions and shifts of perspective, a number of themes return time and time again, in Nietzsche's work, and some of his views seem stable enough to form a target for critique, and some of those targets are taken on in this book. I will make use of the themes of will to power, altruism and self-interest, and cognition (knowledge, judgement and learning).

One of the things from Nietzsche that I do not engage with is the theme of 'eternal recurrence', from Nietzsche's later work (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) because I don't know what to make of it, like many other commentators. That may be a problem because some say that it is the crux of Nietzsche's thought, and that none of his other ideas meant so much to him (*ibid.*, p. 323). Apparently, the principle is to be interpreted as saying that 'one's life is justified only if one would want to have again and again the same life one had already had' (Nehamas 1985, p. 7). I understand that the idea refers to the will to an unconditional acceptance to life. One accepts life as it is to the extent that one is prepared to repeat without end everything that happened. The good and the bad in life go together and one cannot select out the first from the second. However, it is at odds with what I see as the crux of Nietzsche's philosophy: an ongoing transformation and transcendence in which nothing recurs as the same. Why would one want to repeat what one has transcended? However, if Nietzsche means the eternal recurrence of the same principles of ongoing change, rather than the outcomes of the change process, then I can make sense of it. In fact, with the 'cycle of discovery' that I proposed in Chapter 5, and which I applied to change of meaning in Chapter 6, I claim an ongoing return of the principles of differentiation and accommodation as a 'logic' of change, of knowledge and meaning. However, if Nietzsche means the eternal recurrence of the same principles of ongoing change, rather than the outcomes of the change process, then I can make sense of it. In fact, with the 'cycle of discovery' that I proposed in Chapter 5, and which I applied to change of meaning in Chapter 6, I claim an ongoing return of the principles of differentiation and accommodation as a 'logic' of change, of knowledge and meaning.

However that may be, like Nietzsche (and Socrates) I plead for facing and accepting death without the promise of an afterlife, seeing life as a precious and one-time gift that one should cherish and exhaust even in the face of its hardship and horror. Perhaps this comes close at least to Nietzsche's love of fate (*amor fati*).

I will try to refute some of Nietzsche's ideas, in particular the idea, which remains implicit in his work but pervades it, that an autonomous self can transcend itself in ongoing questioning and searching, and hardly needs others in the process, which I relate to his rejection of benevolence. Some readers will say that one cannot refute anything in Nietzsche since he does not make any general proposals for the good life, since he rejects generalities (universals) and makes allowance for differences in the world and for

the idiosyncrasies of people, so that no general rule can be given (Nehamas 1985). Nietzsche has had great influence with this view, particularly on a number of twentieth-century philosophers (such as Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault and Glucksmann). Existentialist philosophers also sought a new recognition of the uniqueness of each individual to escape from alienation in societal and technical systems.

All this would explain the frequency of paradox in his work. However, I cannot accept the argument. In Chapter 6 I also expressed reservations concerning universals, without, however, throwing them overboard. I doubt that Nietzsche completely rejected universals. Why write anything, outside literary work, if it makes no general claim at all? One can write like that, but then it is literature, not philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche certainly intended his writing to be literary (see *Zarathustra*, in particular) but not *only* that. He was making philosophical claims. And in philosophy, if nothing one says can be refuted, one should not say them. That at least is my view. Even if Nietzsche himself were to make the claim that he is not making any general claims, I would take his work as making claims since the analysis of such presumed claims is interesting and fruitful. I am confident that Nietzsche would have approved of such a move. He encouraged people not to follow him but to form their own ideas.

The answer, I think, lies in the perspectivism that Nietzsche adopts (see pp. 000–000). Anything we think or say, at any time, is derived from a certain perspective, which enables a view but also limits it. Since Nietzsche is always ready to re-examine perspectives, his work may seem, and may indeed in places be, contradictory. That is in line with his pragmatist orientation. This does not mean that contradiction is accepted, let alone sought, but it is seen as inevitable.

### Nietzsche's insights

In his naturalistic view of cognition as rooted in the body and its physiology Nietzsche followed the thought of Spinoza; but he was still far ahead of his time. There are more connections with Spinoza. As Nietzsche recognized (in a postcard to his friend Franz Overbeck in 1881) he shared with Spinoza the denial of free will, of teleology (the idea of a goal towards which humanity strives or develops), of a moral world order, of altruism and of evil.

As noted in Chapter 5, the naturalistic recognition of the interweaving of body and mind, in bodily processes, unconscious drives and feelings as sources of conduct, has been confirmed in recent research in social psychology and brain science. It has been shown, literally, in brain scans how reasons for conduct are given in rationalizations post hoc rather than as reasons *ex ante* for rational choices. In view of the influence of these bodily, unconscious processes, the notion of free will in the sense of full conscious control of our actions is an illusion.

Part of Nietzsche's striving was to undermine transcendent metaphysics conceived as knowledge of real, enduring essences of the world that lie beyond experience. As summed up by Janaway (2007, p. 4): 'the self is a composite of drives and affective states, of which our conscious knowledge is never a complete or adequate reflection ... We are not essentially rational or ... unified or ... known to ourselves. The drives that compose us compete and strive against one another and organize themselves hierarchically, giving rise to a multiplicity of feelings and attitudes within the individual'. A dominant force is the will to power, in a discharge of strength. The idea of a self that is not transparent to itself, and the idea that cognition is rooted in the body and shot through with feelings, go back to Pascal, Montaigne and Spinoza, and return in the work of Merleau-Ponty and in the present stream of 'embodied cognition' (discussed in Chapter 5).

Nietzsche's view of cognition leads to 'perspectivism'. In his view any view is biased, and facts are always interpretations, so that no view can claim universal truth, and therefore one needs to allow for and welcome a diversity of views. This connects with an evolutionary view of knowledge (discussed in Chapter 5). Nietzsche himself was critical of evolutionary thought, though I will not discuss that here. With this perspectivist view also Nietzsche was ahead of his time, and few people would now quarrel with it. Metaphorically, at any one time one can look only in one direction, ignoring others, and the eye cannot see itself. A view entails largely tacit orientations, presumptions, categorizations and word meanings that are taken for granted but could always be different. In fact, the implication of Nietzsche's view is that cognition is inherently social – and this is hard to reconcile with his rejection of benevolence, or so I argue in this book.

For Nietzsche the dominant force in the human being is will to power, in a release of strength, and here with all his criticism of metaphysics Nietzsche himself reverts to a metaphysics of his own. He gives no genealogical or evolutionary arguments for its existence. It seems related to the much older notion of the *conatus essendi* – the will to survive that played an important role for Spinoza, amongst others – and the notion of *thymos* – the drive to manifest oneself. One can argue that the drive of the *conatus essendi* is an outcome of evolution: it contributes to survival and procreation and hence transmission of one's genes. However, Nietzsche explicitly denied the idea that the will to survive forms the central drive. He showed how much people jeopardize their survival in order to fulfil their will to power. Again in the words of Janaway (2007, p. 156–9) this is 'a characteristic of sub-personal drives ... each of which functions so as to preserve and intensify its own activity against other drives ... appropriating more than they would need to survive ... various of the drives that constitute the human being have won out temporarily over others, while what constructs itself in consciousness is a picture that allows the "I" to identify oneself with the victorious forces in the sub-personal struggle'. This sounds strikingly like

the neural Darwinism of Edelman. This shows how new cognitive structures arise from rivalry and interaction between existing structures, hence a connection with evolution after all, though not the evolution of humanity but of neural structures in the brain. Perhaps this could contribute to a non-metaphysical foundation of the will to power.

Nietzsche stands out, in particular, when we contrast him with Schopenhauer, who was an early source of inspiration to Nietzsche. According to Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation* existence of the will is the one thing we can be certain about: it pervades all of nature and it is uncontrollable (we have no free will) and insatiable. In the drive of the will we try to escape from want, yet when we satisfy it there is always a new want, so that we are never satisfied and even if we ever were we would then fall into equally unbearable boredom. Every 'higher' manifestation of the will – such as in the dominance of an animal over inanimate nature, the human being over the animal, and the one human being over the other – operates to the destruction of lower manifestations. However, human beings have a capacity for pity and from that they can get away from the pernicious will but only by surrendering their selves in a Buddhist merging with the one or the all. By contrast, Nietzsche celebrates the will, exalts the self above any other, and despises pity and self-sacrifice. Schopenhauer on the other hand exalts asceticism and the mortification of the will and the body (as its manifestation) to the point of dying from hunger and inviting destruction.

As noted before, the term 'will to power' raises misunderstandings. It is not only, not even in the first place, a will to dominate others – though in the development of the human being that did and still does play a role – but is in its highest form an urge to self-transcendence, in an incessant search for enlightenment, in a struggle beyond established views and assumptions.

Of the greatest importance, for the present book, is the view of Nietzsche concerning morality. Nietzsche gaily hammered away at Christian morality of sin, guilt, penance, charity, pity and self-sacrifice. And he is radical in this. For example in the *Gay Science* he writes: 'charity proves lack of power', 'compassion is an urge for a new possession', 'benevolence and pity are an urge to conquer', 'morality as the vengeance of the failed, limited spirit' (pp. 48, 50, 272). Charity furthers humanity in one sense but self-denial is a crime against humanity in another sense. A morality for the weak weakens humanity. Christian morality suppresses the human being in its creative destruction, in art, entrepreneurship, science and philosophy. According to Nietzsche, if the will to power is obstructed in its external manifestations, in deference or surrender to the weak or to established institutions, it turns upon the self, in self-chastisement and asceticism. If it cannot turn outside it turns inside.

As Nietzsche argued, the fallacy of origin, also known as the fallacy of functionalism, is a common one. It is to think that because something (a trait, a practice) serves a current purpose then that purpose must also be

the reason as to why it arose (by design or in evolution). In many cases, evolution has hijacked (or 'exapted') a trait that arose from one purpose to serve another. Evolution had to make do with whatever was thrown up in previous evolution. As a result, much 'design' in nature is not very intelligent. In an intelligent design it could have been much more effective or efficient. This may yield complications or obstacles to further evolution but it may also give a positive twist, yielding a new potential.

For example, take the eyes (a much loved example for creationists to prove intelligent design). In the eyes, veins run in front of the retina, have to pass through it to connect with the brain behind, and this causes the blind spot. An intelligent designer would have done it differently.

One example Nietzsche used, in his *Towards the Genealogy of Morality*, was that of punishment. This serves as a deterrent, specifically a deterrent against egotism, but it arose for other reasons, such as revenge, paying a debt, getting even, as a mere show of power or as an exercise of lust. In his analysis of the development (genealogy) of morality Nietzsche reconstructed the morality of compassion, altruism and self-sacrifice as a revolt of the weak ('slaves') out of their resentment against the strong ('masters'). They have the power of the majority and have appropriated morality in an alliance with religion. It is the exercise of their own will to power. Individual will to power of 'the strong' is curtailed by external forces of custom, law and punishment, and thus restrained it turns upon the self to overwhelm it and to torture it in self-denial. The result is suffocation of the forces of self-realization. The shame that this brings about is diverted into a feeling of virtue with the claim that self-sacrifice is a sacrifice for the sake of a higher religious purpose. This is most pronounced in religious asceticism. The curtailing of the will to power is supported with a transcendent punishment or reward in the hereafter. Heaven gives compensation for the self-inflicted suffering of self-denial.

Benevolence is particularly perverse when it turns into pity, which despises, is demeaning to both the subject and the object of pity, and is often a revenge on the weak in a placing of the object of pity at an even lower level of well-being or expression of will to power in an elevating of oneself above the object of pity (and imposing the demand for thankfulness and obedience, and inviting applause). The feeling that the object has a right to pity may deflect attention from his or her weakness and lack of effort to overcome it. For Nietzsche sorrow and suffering are to be borne and to be taken as a test and a challenge to become strong. He himself suffered from illness (severe headaches) that he strove to overcome through hard work.

While in contrast with pity compassion may be genuine, with a concern for the dignity of its object, it still undermines the potential of the strong and detracts from the realization of his or her potential and negates life. According to Nietzsche altruism and compassion are both impossible and undesirable. They are impossible because people are too different to allow for the empathy that compassion requires. We can never feel precisely what

other people feel. They are undesirable because they suppress and distort the life force of the will to power that forms the essence of man. According to Nietzsche Christian morality has been used, by church and state, to discipline and suppress people in accordance with the status quo in the interest of elites in power and to divert potentially destructive drives. The morality of self-sacrifice is sold as charity but was and still is employed for the discounting and suppression of citizens by spiritual, intellectual and political elites building cathedrals of authority, with the illusion and false hope of a hereafter as a carrot and stick.

At a few places, Nietzsche recognizes that the self needs others, friends and foes, to escape from illusions of the self (e.g. in *Human All Too Human*, p. 292). He makes allowance for altruism between friends who may sufficiently know each other to achieve empathy. This is accompanied, however, by an equilibrium of power. He also allows for benevolence from the master to his slave, or the superior to his inferior, in a spontaneous overflow from the bounty of his supremacy. However, these points are swamped by an avalanche of diatribe against compassion, altruism and orientation towards the other as a betrayal of the self, human nature and the flourishing of life. It is an inevitable fact of life, and only right, that self-interest prevails, and there is no room or justification for altruism. In the preface to his *Towards the Genealogy of Morality* (p. 26) he says that the 'regard outside, instead of back to the self, is part of slave morality ... The real, noble spirit seeks opposition only in order to say yes to himself even more gratefully, with more alacrity'.

In spite of Nietzsche's disdain for economic behaviour as vulgar and destructive of spirit, in his denial of altruism and his view of the inevitable and beneficial dominance of self-interest, and in his appreciation of rivalry and competition as a source of development, there is a striking similarity to the intuitions and claims of modern mainstream economists.

The main point of the present book is that Nietzsche makes one crucial error of thought. However, it is important to preserve what Nietzsche got right, in his rebellion against the suppression of the potential of human life and creative destruction. Rejection of Nietzsche is difficult especially because I want to preserve, yes cherish, what he called the Dionysian drive of life, creation, transformation and self-transcendence. He surely is right, to a large extent, in his claim that often morality is hypocritical, manipulative and a smothering cushion for individual expression, manifestation and creativity.

The challenge is to arrive at an ethics that maintains this and yet at the same time helps us to get away from egotism and narcissism. This is the paradoxical task. So where does Nietzsche's error of thought lie?

### Criticism

Let us return to Nietzsche's rejection of evolutionary theory. As mentioned, he notes that often people put their survival at risk in order to express their

will to power. More importantly, he denies the operation of selection and the influence of the selection environment in favour of autonomous forces that from within create ideas and forms of thought in which the environment is exploited and mastered (Copleston 1962, vol. 7, part II, p. 186). There, in my view, lies the fundamental weakness of Nietzsche's thought. As indicated in Chapter 4 in my view the will *not* to master the other and to be open to him or her, with empathy and compassion, is needed for learning, and that idea I derive from Levinas, among others.

Nietzsche's argument concerning the fallacy of origin can also be applied to his own argument. If compassion and apparent altruism are indeed employed as an instrument of power, condescension or manipulation, as Nietzsche claims, then this leaves open the possibility that it arose for other, nobler reasons of sincere empathy and compassion for the weak. Nietzsche rejected the evolutionary argument for the emergence of compassion that his friend Paul Rée proposed with an argument of group selection, according to which benevolence and altruism can help groups to survive. While in earlier evolutionary theory this argument was rejected, in recent theory it is confirmed, as I will discuss in Chapter 10. I agree with Nietzsche that we should beware of explanations only on the basis of genes. We should not neglect that genes are 'expressed' in interaction with the natural, social and cultural environment. We should beware of genetic determinism. While conduct is formed, in part, by genetically determined inclinations, those inclinations can be bypassed or bent in their effects by culture. Nietzsche's genealogy is a good example of a more cultural analysis. But that does not imply that we can ignore genetically determined inclinations.

In fact, Nietzsche himself wanted a naturalization of ethics, basing it only on natural instincts of the human being, and for him the one overriding instinct was will to power. I am now claiming that an inclination towards altruism is also one of our natural instincts. Would this convince Nietzsche to accept altruism as part of a naturalized ethics? While I go far in my naturalism, I think that when some instinct has perverse effects we should try to use culture to divert it.

In short, it may be that a genetically determined drive towards altruism in its effects has been bent by cultural circumstances as indicated by Nietzsche. It may be that indoctrination with economic reasoning and policy-making has perverted a natural drive towards altruism.

Nietzsche claimed, correctly, that feelings form part of knowledge and insight. This is particularly the case for an understanding of morality. In Nietzsche's view, current morality is a rationalization of feelings that go along with inclinations and aversions that we have developed in processes of acculturation, in family, school, work, etc. These in turn developed from the exercise of moral precepts that developed earlier out of feelings and conflicts in the exercise of will to power. Later generations have been socialized into adopting the feelings that go along with the morality of self-sacrifice and self-denial,

even though these have turned against us, thwarting our human potential (the argument is given mostly in the *Towards the Genealogy of Morality*).

If morality is a rationalization of feelings, it is difficult to understand it and share it without sharing the underlying feelings – so Nietzsche argued (Janaway 2007). But here something goes wrong in the argument. If it is explained what feelings are associated with what morality, perhaps we can understand the explanation without actually sharing the underlying feelings. We can empathize without identifying. We can to some extent imagine how others feel without necessarily sharing those feelings. This is more difficult the greater the cognitive distance to the other is, but one can develop empathy for people who think differently.

It is not easy to imagine the feelings of my cat. Yet I know that he has emotions and feelings of fright, fury, confusion, contentment and the like. Recently when a member of my family broke out in tears, the cat – a tomcat – looked up, gazing intently with widening pupils. Very gingerly, he approached softly – slinking, pussyfooting a step, stopping, a hesitant paw raised, and proceeding again. Does this indicate that a cat can mirror emotions even of humans? Someone who has studied cats could tell me more, and this may help me to empathize even with my cat.

By Nietzsche's own logic, if we are to understand his counter-ethic against altruism and benevolence, we should empathize with the feelings he had behind that drive. Many a dedicated artist, scientist or entrepreneur who has conducted some invention, creative work or innovation can indeed testify to the feelings involved: in the inevitable tensions with the status quo; in the clashes with claims on one's time or commitment for the sake of others; in the exhortations not to go against established tastes, interests, customs, and to have more 'other regarding' considerations for the more pedestrian fellow travellers in life. But this does not mean that we must agree with Nietzsche's ethics.

The question also arises as to what the feelings of Nietzsche himself were that lay behind the hammering away of his anti-morality stance. We can psychologize about underlying motives from his failed love relationships and long lasting lack of recognition and attention for his work (Janz 1994). But how relevant is that?

In going against Nietzsche's assault on benevolence, in the spirit of his argument I may have to ask myself whether my motivation to defend benevolence – while I think it arises from genuine awe and interest concerning humanity in both myself and others and in the magic and drama in interaction between people – is in fact a hypocritical rationalization of my own softness, weakness and lack of courage to go against what is 'politically correct'. Perhaps there is a hidden slave mentality festering in the back of my mind. Perhaps I am arguing in favour of altruism because I am afraid to be abandoned by others, due to neglect by my parents when I was a child. Again the question is how relevant that would be. I must try to face hidden

motives in order to avoid prejudice or mental blindness. This will never fully succeed but that does not mean that one should not try. Did Nietzsche do that?

I am certainly revolted by the exuberant display of vulgarity by some of the rich; by people who exhibit their exuberance and will to power by parking their BMW or SUV on the pavement at the supermarket, obstructing entry to mothers with prams, the disabled and elderly, and their way of getting out of their cars, hitching their trousers over their fat bellies, looking around defiantly, ready to pay for any parking ticket, about which they could not care less; by people who dodge tax and claim that their money is all their own personal achievement, insensitive to the fact that the ground under their feet is soaked with the blood and sweat of generations who fought for freedom and the rule of law, created science and technology, and built the infrastructure and institutions on which money is now made; by people who might claim a Nietzschean ethic of spontaneous overflow of power, in disdain of the weak with their slave mentality.

I detest Nietzsche's gusto for the warrior ethic, with its yearning for glory, honour and the thrill of battle and conquest, with dismissal and supreme disdain for the vanquished. Of course, Nietzsche seeks to transform and sublimate that urge. And I cannot deny that it is part of human, specifically male human, nature.

Also, I grant Nietzsche that this urge also releases creative energy and innovation. That is the horrible dilemma: the partnering that may arise between evil and creative force. Sheets-Johnstone (2008) attributes thirst for battle and blood to an evolutionary heritage in male–male competition that was part of sexual selection: males engage in macho show-offs to impress females and to gain privileged access to resources. Losers in such confrontation submit to the authority of the alpha male. This heritage yields a hidden fund that can and in history repeatedly has been and still is exploited for bloody war and massacre. However, what we can do, and in fact have with some success done, is to turn such urges around to less destructive activities, such as sports and competition in the economy, sciences and arts, though we can also feel that this detracts from their value. In this way the urge can be subdued or redirected, though it still lurks in the dark, ready to be mobilized into violence, such as in sport hooliganism.

In summary, Nietzsche is certainly right to some extent with his claim of a will to power, with the positive sides of that in creativity and an urge to learn and towards self-transcendence. I also admit that morality and altruism can be hypocritical and can be used as an instrument for will to power. I contest, however, that the will to power is the only deep, overruling and inevitable drive of humanity. With all his opposition to dogmatism and fundamental assumptions without critical discussion, Nietzsche falls for it himself in his fixed assumption of the will to power as a dominant and indomitable urge. There are evolutionary arguments for egotism but also for benevolence

and altruism. These yield a conscience by which we can feel guilty if we pursue our interests to the detriment of others. That pain of conscience also invalidates another argument of Nietzsche that compassion only multiplies sorrow. Also the ignoring of the pain of others can cause pain: the pain of conscience. Here I draw near to an argument of Levinas that I can put aside my conscience to ignore the suffering of the other human being, but I cannot bypass that feeling of conscience.<sup>4</sup>

However, my criticism of Nietzsche is mostly that his philosophy is self-destructive. If the central thrust of his philosophy is indeed a Dionysian transcendence of the self, then this cannot be achieved without empathy, directed at the other, which Nietzsche rejects.

Given Nietzsche's view of cognition as driven by unconscious impulses, our limited free will and our inability to escape from ourselves, it is surprising that systematically, time and again, he implicitly or explicitly assumes that the individual generates his own thoughts and transcends them apparently without any need for interaction with others. That interaction would require empathy and benevolence that Nietzsche rejects. For him orientation towards others entails the loss, the evasion, of the self. Again and again we find in his work the eulogy of going it alone, in solitary seclusion, at seashores or on desolate mountaintops. We find it in the inability he claims for people to empathize with others and in his idea that receiving something from another yields dependence and loss of power and that the giving to another is inspired by a will to power over the other. That may be the case but it is not the only and inevitable feature of relationships.

Nietzsche looked forward to the overman (*Übermensch*), a new man who will have wrestled himself free from an enslaving, hypocritical morality and knows how to realize himself fully and thereby to transcend himself. With Nietzsche, the overman appears to be a Baron Munchausen who lifts himself from a swamp by his own hair. How he does that Nietzsche does not tell us. He is too busy making room for creative destruction and stops short of telling us how it works.

At some points in his work Nietzsche does laud friendship as a source of joint transcendence in a 'common higher thirst for an ideal that stands above them' (in the *Gay Science*) and 'a common longing for the overman (*'Übermensch'*)' (in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*). However, even good friendship may also be tainted by hypocrisy and obfuscation out of compassion and rivalry. And, I would argue, there are so many opportunities beyond or short of friendship. Nietzsche recognizes the need for interaction between people, not only for the weak but also for the strong, though for them it is mostly the interaction of battle or war. One should cherish one's enemies, since it is from battle with them that one becomes strong. Here, his argument comes closest to the argument developed in the present book, where I will argue that one needs others to correct one's errors as a condition for developing

oneself and indeed for 'overcoming oneself', as Nietzsche constantly seeks to do and recommends to mankind.

If we follow and further develop Nietzschean and current thought on cognition, this yields the view that knowledge, insight and the ground for action are constructed on the basis of experience in interaction with the world and other people. From this perspective one needs the other to become oneself.

Opposite to Nietzsche's view that turning to others entails the avoidance of self, I claim that we need others to discover and develop ourselves. Alone, we cannot fathom ourselves. One might think that if cognition is constructed debate no longer has force, or is even senseless, since everyone can call upon his or her own truth. This is the bane of postmodernism. Here lies an error of thought. If we accept that our thought is constructed and we cannot claim objective knowledge of the world as it is in itself (whatever that may mean), and we cannot descend from our mind to see how it is hooked onto the world, then the only chance we have for correcting failures of our thought is to confront them with what others have constructed in insight. Debate is more important than ever.

This means that for fundamental reasons of cognition we need others for our thinking and our being, particularly if we want to rise above ourselves from a never-ending thirst for new insight and enlightenment, which for Nietzsche was the highest good. Nietzsche's own life was very sparse in its direct contact and debate with others. He was wrestling with the published thought of other philosophers, but that yields little rejoinder.

Self-directed will to power may release power, but it also limits the scope and use of that power. It does not free the individual for the flight of the eagle that Nietzsche cherished, but clips its wings.

In the remainder of this book I will argue more closely that in contradiction to Nietzsche individual development and creative destruction not only *allow for* benevolence and compassion but *require* them and cannot do without them. I will argue that they are needed not only for reasons of ethics but also for reasons of cognition. For that I employ the insights into cognition and language discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. As Wittgenstein argued, private language cannot exist. Moreover, for meaning and sense making one needs other people. Without empathy there is no communication. For another part of my argument I now turn to another philosopher, fundamentally opposed to Nietzsche: Emmanuel Levinas.

# 8

## Levinas: Philosophy of the Other

Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95), Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) opposed the disengagement of the individual as described in Chapter 3. They argued for a self that is oriented towards the other. For all three the relation between self and other precedes and transcends the identity of the self. In that sense ethics is primary philosophy, if ethics is seen as oriented towards the relation between self and other. For Buber (2006) the relation with the other is a matter of dialogue in reciprocity and symmetry, in give and take and in a convergence of self and other. That suggests an idyllic end station in which difference and power no longer play a role. Levinas denies that. He is extremely radical. According to him the relation between self and other remains asymmetrical: the self remains more responsible for the other than vice versa, the self surrenders itself without calculation and without demanding or even expecting anything in return. Self and other can never merge, be subsumed in each other, become equal or even comparable. Especially on the last point I agree and therefore I prefer to proceed with Levinas rather than Buber.

For Levinas the feeling of responsibility for the other is not a rational choice but something that happens to you and that you experience as being chosen or 'elected' and that makes you unique, irreplaceable vis-à-vis the unique other. There is an ethical call to surrender to the other, and to suffer from his or her suffering, an imperative that precedes all other consideration. One does not invite it or rationally accept it or find it justified or understand it: it just happens to one. Levinas speaks of giving oneself as a 'hostage'. With this term he means that the self becomes 'victim without being guilty' (Levinas 1995, p. 115). Responsibility and dedication to the other go so far that they apply also when the other obstructs or even persecutes me (Levinas 1991b, p. 116). I will return to this point.

From the traditional centrality of the self in Western philosophy it is difficult to find a foundation for benevolence or altruism. Levinas turns it around: benevolence is primary, precedes the self and all consideration of self-interest, and defence of one's interests is a compromise on that. One can

and, in conditions of real life in society, inevitably does compromise on the ethical call, but the call remains valid to maintain an ideal of conduct that we should not forget.

Levinas, as a Jew, was strongly driven by his abhorrence of the Holocaust that had cruelly cut into his own family. He rises in arms against what he calls the 'paganism' of Nazism, i.e. the acceptance and glorification of the finite, bodily, worldly existence in a heroic exaltation of it in a spontaneous activity that intensifies life and lifts it above its finitude in a self-transcendence that is continually in search of itself (Guibal 2005, p. 124). Levinas says that the pagan strives for 'the cult of power and of earthly grandeur, the legitimacy of power to confirm itself as power, to love and hate spontaneously', and that in the appeal to the 'gratuitous, i.e. heroic deed, there lies the permanent source of Hitlerism' (Levinas 1991a, p. 152, 1976, p. 197).

Here it is as if we were reading about the thought of Nietzsche. In an anachronism, Nietzsche has been reproached for the inspiration that his work contributed to Nazism, though the idea does have its grounds. Nietzsche of course could not see this coming and any accusation of anti-Semitism is nonsense since he despised it. However, his sister, who guarded his heritage and was anti-Semitic, did try to steer the interpretation of his work in that direction (Janz 1994).

As a counterweight to the absolute evil of Nazism and of other ideologies that subjugated the individual human being, such as Stalinism or the regime of Pol Pot in Cambodia, we require something that is sufficiently strong, and for that it must be absolute. For Levinas the source of all evil lies in some justification or other of the suffering of people ('they aren't really people', 'in the pursuit of an ideology individual sacrifices need to be made') (Levinas 1991b, p. 109). As a counterweight the self must feel personally and unconditionally responsible for the suffering of the other.

I should immediately add that Levinas repeatedly recognizes that in the transition from the ideal, isolated relationship between self and other to a society of third and more parties charity towards the single other must make a transition to justice in society, with rules that are universal and impersonal (e.g. Levinas 1991b, pp. 113–15). There I must also feel responsible for third parties and ask myself whether the single other does not damage the other others. There the asymmetry of the ideal relation disappears and reciprocity and equality under the law appear. How that compromise of the ideal relationship for the sake of justice can still reflect the ideal is problematic. In the relativization of the relationship of self to other, in the loss of its absolutism and unconditionality, how can we maintain the ethical force that Levinas considered necessary as a counterweight to absolute evil in the world? In his work the notion of justice is highly embryonic and not specified. I will return to this.

In this chapter I will give a survey of some of the main lines of the philosophy of Levinas. It is not easy to comprehend his thought, and next to the reading of his work (in the original French) I employ interpretations

by Critchley and Bernasconi (2002), Guibal (2005) and Guwy (2008), and I use his later work where he revisits his earlier work and replies to queries and criticism, to test and improve my understanding. From this reading Levinas emerges as an ethical antipode to Nietzsche, though I will indicate some interesting parallels. However, they remain opposites concerning the relationship between self and other.

### Issues

Levinas wages opposition, like a number of earlier philosophers of the 20th century, to a number of fundamental intuitions and views in Western philosophy concerning being (*être*), what exists (ontology), rationality, knowledge, the self and the relation between self and other. These views go back to classical Greek thought (Plato, Aristotle) and reappear in the Renaissance and Enlightenment. As discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3, in that tradition the self is seen as autonomous, self-sufficient and disconnected from its environment. The world, including the self, is supposed to be 'present' to consciousness. Knowledge is seen as 'seeing', 'grasping', 'comprehension' and 'absorption', with 'representations' of the world in the mind. Knowledge is assimilation, and thereby reduction, of experience into universal categories of thought. The pretension of the self is that thus it can contain everything in its environment, including itself. This idea has the pernicious ethical consequence that one also looks in this way to fellow human beings as something that one can absorb and 'make one's own'.

In his search beyond 'being' Levinas was inspired by Plato's thought that ideas lie beyond observable reality. However, in the tradition of Plato knowledge is contemplation of the one, universal ideal that stands behind the observed confusion of reality – and that is not what Levinas is aiming at. On the contrary, he opposes the 'totality' of concepts that pretend to encompass individuals but thereby deny and suppress them.

The self emerges, especially in the Enlightenment, as rational and autonomous, with an internally oriented view of thinking as an internal monologue, a rationality that includes itself, a self that understands itself, encompasses itself, as emerges in the 'I think therefore I am' of Descartes. For Socrates finding the truth was a matter of delving into the self and surfacing from the deep with the insight already there by means of dialogue and debate as an intellectual 'midwife'. By contrast, in the premodern thought of Montaigne (1965 [1580]) and Pascal (1977 [1670]), the self partly blocks the view of itself, casts a shadow it cannot jump across. Or, as I said earlier: the eye cannot see itself. In traditional philosophy the self is seen as autonomous and given prior to relationships between people.

Levinas opposes the dominant idea of 'being'. Among other things he rejects the idea of God as something that exists and forms the ground of all else that exists ('onto-theology'). God should be seen as something

beyond existence that we can never grasp. Also, meaning in language and sense-making cannot be reduced to categories in terms of existing things, as happens in Western philosophy (see also pp. 000–000). Levinas also opposed the being of humanity in the sense of its nature as a *conatus essendi*, the inveterate striving of the self to survive. The human being should have a perspective that allows it to escape from the self. That perspective lies in a feeling of unconditional responsibility for the other human being, which precedes the self and transcends it (Bernstein 2002) and lifts the human being out of its existence, ‘other than being’ (as he calls it in the title of his 1978).

Levinas is to some extent an existentialist philosopher in the sense that – following Henri Bergson (1854–1941), Martin Heidegger and Gabriel Marcel – he sees human existence as a process, as a participating, acting and being involved in the world. Acting is more fundamental than thinking. As in the English word ‘being’, the French word ‘*être*’ is both a verb and a substantive. Following Heidegger, Levinas stresses ‘being’ as a verb. Abstract knowledge in the form of the assimilation of experience into categories, universals, as if they were boxes containing individuals, is preceded and trumped by a much richer form of ‘knowledge as experience’ (my term, not Levinas’s) in the practical handling of things in interaction with specific people in specific situations. His bent towards specific, individual people and their circumstances, and his mistrust of abstractions, universals and the impersonal forces of ideology, state, market and technology that they produce, which lead to an alienation of the human being, are a characteristic of existentialist philosophy.

For Heidegger being in the world is to be inspired by the inevitability of death that can strike at any moment. We should live truly, authentically, in the awareness that we can die at any moment: ‘Being unto death’ (*Sein zum Tode*). Levinas sees that as remaining imprisoned in the being of the self. He wants to go beyond that and in that sense he is not an existentialist humanist. He wants a rescue from alienation not by flight into the self but by orientation towards the other. He has that in common with Gabriel Marcel, who was an important source of inspiration for Levinas. The importance of death lies beyond death of the self, in the death of the other human being. The death of the other brings me outside myself and beyond being. It is odd that the human being should orient itself towards its existence while we know that it is bound to perish.

Levinas is also a ‘corporeal’ philosopher, in line with the perspective of ‘embodied cognition’ that I discussed in Chapter 5. We do not *have* a body; rather we *are* a body. The feeling for the other is also corporeal; the other is under our skin. The other is associated with hunger and the sacrifice that we should be prepared to make to surrender, in our hunger, the last piece of our bread to the other in his or her hunger.

Preceding communication, language is contact and action. To proceed further in this than Levinas did, see my discussion in Chapter 6 (pp. 000–000)

on language as action (illocution, speech acts), as influencing others, before (in evolution and in personal development) it becomes reference and categorization. I also recognize in Levinas the pragmatic theory of language from Wittgenstein with the idea of *meaning as use*, the idea that terms in language are foremost instruments. The issue is not so much whether application of a term is true or not, but principally whether it works, functions, is useful or not, in a specific context, as when a screwdriver is used as a hammer.<sup>1</sup>

I agree with many of Levinas's views, as is also apparent from the earlier chapters on cognition and language. I also see 'being' as a verb, as an activity in the world; cognition as embodied; knowledge as constructed in interaction in the world; and language as action. That does not mean that I do not have criticism, as I will discuss later. I will deviate from Levinas on some fundamental points and I am sure he would not agree with how I use his thought.

### Elaboration

Novelty must come from something outside of us (this is the principle of 'exteriority', to take that term from Levinas). This in itself is not a new insight. The core of science is that one subjects ideas 'from within' to surprises in the form of new facts 'from outside'. As Wittgenstein argued, private language cannot exist. For consistent reference we need others to correct us. According to a similar logic there can be no private ethics. We think something is good because we honestly think it is. If we did not think that we would not try to do good in this way. I cannot have a pain and doubt that I have it. Judgements are often like pain: they happen to us and we cannot step out of them to judge them from outside. We require external evidence and criticism to unmask and unravel our hidden motives and drives. For that we need other people, or a God, if one can believe in him. However, this argument may be more mine than Levinas's, though I do think it touches upon his thought.

For Levinas, the 'opening' (my word, not his) of the self to the other goes beyond cognition, understanding and transcending the limitations of the self. In his earlier work (*Totality and Infinity*, [1961]) the self is, in the first instance, tied to itself, which is in due course experienced as frightening, oppressive or generates boredom and evokes an urge to escape. He calls this 'evasion' in one of his earlier works (Levinas [1962]). The self needs the other to escape from itself, not only for cognitive reasons, as I have emphasized, but also for emotional and spiritual reasons. Concerning cognition I refer to the discussion on 'embodied cognition' in Chapter 5 (pp. 000–000). There I pointed out that recognition of the embodiment of mind robs us of the illusion of life after death and of the illusion of a free, autonomous self that stands above itself, detached from the body. On the other hand this can give a feeling of being chained to a limited and fragile body, which

generates the urge to get away from it. The opening to the other is, in other words, not only a search but also a flight. In the later work of Levinas (*Other than Being*, 1978) the argument changes, as I will show later.

Levinas concludes, correctly in my view, that the flight from the self requires that we must not judge or approach the other from the perspective of our existing views. If we do that we never get away and beyond our present self. As long as one takes oneself as the point of departure in the approach to the other we remain locked up in ourselves. In his novel *More Die of Heartbreak* Saul Bellow speaks of the 'claustrophobia of consciousness'. We must be open to the other without evaluating or judging in advance and without the pretension to ever completely grasp the other. Levinas says that this opening is not 'receptivity', and I understand that in the sense that receptivity presupposes something that in the reception remains the same, as in a reception hall. We require what he calls 'passiveness': one should not determine the terms but surrender to the terms of the other. He (1987, p. 277) uses the metaphor of breathing and letting oneself be literally inspired (breathed into) by the other. Breathing also is not based on a choice on the basis of an evaluation of what it will yield. It is something you undergo. This is the spirit in which one should set oneself aside. In this Levinas goes further than Buber: further than empathy as a condition for understanding the other. It requires altruism, the willingness to make sacrifices, including when one is not rewarded for them. There lies an ethical appeal that precedes rationality, knowledge and self-interest.

For Levinas the self receives an impulse towards surrender and responsibility for the other from the face, the 'visage', of the other that radiates humanity, fragility and mortality, which drags me out of my egotism, my preoccupation with myself. The I sees in the visage something that goes beyond the other as an object, that transcends 'being' itself and is an 'exposition' of inevitable death (Levinas 1995, p. 132). Earlier I said that we should learn to accept death and the finitude and fragility of life. But the self cannot know its own death. We see fragility and death in the visage of the other, and this generates an awareness that lifts us above ourselves. But for Levinas mere contemplation of the mortality of the other is not enough. The self must feel responsibility for the death of the other (Levinas 1993, p. 49). The visage of the other 'accuses me and obliges me as responsible'. Levinas (1995, p. 134) calls it 'love without desire', in the 'mysterious surplus of the loved one' (*ibid.*, p. 143). In love one sees the other as unique and one is concerned for his or her well-being and life, at any cost to the self. And in its surrender to the other the self feels unique, elected.

Levinas (1987, p. 282) admits that his ideas are vulnerable to an accusation of utopianism. How far is this idea of the relation of self to other wishful thinking? How could it work psychologically? How realistic and viable is it? Levinas has often been reproached for the radical – because unconditional and asymmetric – responsibility of the self for the other, which is always

more than the responsibility of the other for the self, since it goes too far and is impossible for mere humans to muster. The question was posed whether a brute, say an SS executioner, is also a 'visage' to which unconditional dedication is due. The answer is affirmative (Levinas 1991b, p. 243).

This requires clarification. Levinas does not mean that the self takes over the responsibility and blame for the evil from the brute. No: he deserves punishment, but that is not the end of it. We must take the evil that manifests itself to heart, and confront it, feel involved in the relief and prevention of it, and do this vis-à-vis the executioner (Guwy 2008, p. 103). As shown by Kunneman (2009) justice can be 'restorative', as pioneered in Australia. There perpetrator and victim confront each other, and subsequently involve their respective families, in the effort to create some mutual understanding, admission of guilt and acceptance of responsibility, but also attempting to understand and perhaps achieve some forgiveness and repair to provide a perspective for the perpetrator to learn and move on. This is one practical implementation of 'horizontal transcendence'.

But could not the reflection of vulnerability and mortality of the other lead to an intuitive rejection, denial and flight in fear of death? Or revulsion, as with Sartre?

Where has God gone in Levinas? Earlier I said that Levinas rejects God as the basis of all being ('onto-theology') or as the totality of all being (as with Spinoza). As a result of the horrors of the 20th century there cannot be any theodicy for Levinas, no justification of the evil and senseless suffering in the world on the basis of invisible and unfathomable intentions by a good, almighty and providential God. Guibal (2005, p. 136) suggests that an exodus through 'the desert of the absence of God' is needed, with a rejection of theodicy, to arrive at the Levinasian depth and radicalism of an ethical appeal to the human being towards the other. Belief in a theodicy distracts us from that and lulls us into indifference to others. 'Atheism is a condition for a genuine relation to God' (Guwy 2008, p. 75).

According to Levinas God is incomprehensible and we cannot have any direct personal relation to him. We can only have an indirect relation with God, through the other human being (*ibid.*, p. 114). In the relation with the other is manifested the voice of God (Levinas 1991b, p. 120). The 'highness' and 'infinity' of God now lie in the other human being. This is all that has survived the death of God (Levinas 1993, p. 208). Earlier I followed the definition of religion as belief in a connection of a human being with something divine, supernatural, superhuman or super-individual. For Levinas the relation with the other is religious in that the other transcends the self. But it is not a 'Godservice'. There is no longer a God that yields foundations, assures, sets at ease, comforts, consoles, gives hope; no God as ideal sublimation nor who is incarnated, but only a God that keeps us from indifference towards the other human being (Guibal 2005, p. 168) and inspires us to respect, openness, responsibility towards the other and, perhaps, devotion. Levinas

says in the *Totality and Infinity* that ‘the other ... resembles God’ but is ‘not the incarnation of God, but ... the manifestation of the highness of God’. What remains of God with Levinas can hardly be called God any more, in any customary sense, though the remaining sense is fundamental for Levinas. In summary, Levinas offers ‘horizontal transcendence’.

I would add the following. The irresolvable contradiction in the idea of God is that if he is not personal he is an anonymous, abstract universal, a spiritual black hole; and if he is personal he becomes an anthropomorphism. So I would propose the choosing of something that without a doubt is personal and unique, but goes beyond the ego – and that is the other human being.

Levinas repeatedly compares his thought with the step that Kant made from theoretical reason to the practical reason of ethics, by which ethics becomes first philosophy. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant analysed the conditions for the knowledge of what exists, which indicate the limits of our knowledge and our notions of being. In his *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant made a step towards moral conduct in the world that goes beyond knowing the world. Along a comparable line Levinas makes ethics a primary philosophy that precedes knowledge and rationality.

However, the big difference between Kant and Levinas is as follows. With Kant the following of ethical rules is a decision of the autonomous individual on the basis of rational deliberation. With Levinas, by contrast, ethics is a matter of heteronomy, of breaking through the autonomy of the self by an orientation towards the other, and which is beyond and prior to rationality (Bernstein 2002, p. 264). With Levinas ethics is not universal but individual, not rational but intuitive and visceral. With Kant ethical rules, such as the categorical imperative, are universal and no more than a given from rational deliberation (*factum rationis*), without emotional loading, by which practical reason becomes a matter of rationality. This does not suffice to eliminate the tension between on the one hand self-love and self-interest and on the other hand the opening and sacrifice to the other. And in universality there creeps the inhumanity of erasing the individual. An ethics based on the assumption that everyone in humanity is equal is vulnerable to the viewpoint in which others are seen as different, because then they can no longer be human (Putnam 2002, p. 35). Levinas loads the orientation towards the other human being with an immediate, i.e. non-deliberative, emotional charge of openness, respect and awe (Guibal 2005, p. 97) that cannot be relegated to any universal right or duty.

Levinas resists, as I have (see p. 000), the subjugation of the individual to the universal (or the ‘totality’ in the terminology of Levinas), though he recognizes the need for universals. He resists the Platonic notion of truth as the reduction of diversity to the ‘one’, of the reduction of particulars to the universal. However, in the transition from an isolated relation between self and other to a society with a third person or more, one will have to compare

others and their interests and balance them, no matter how different and incomparable they in fact are. Levinas recognizes the value of the Kantian idea of a universal ethical duty, certainly when that concerns the rule never to treat another (only) as a means but always (also) as a goal in him or herself. However, he also finds affinity with the idea of Kierkegaard that the religious experience of the individual human being breaks, suspends and exceeds the universality of the law (Guibal 2005, p. 92). But he forcefully resists what in Kierkegaard he sees as an 'egotistic cry' of a subjectivity that is 'too much concerned with its own happiness and salvation' (Levinas 1987, p. 282) and is less oriented towards the other human being than to a 'tête-à-tête with God in isolation' (Guibal 2005, p. 94).

For Levinas the relation to the other, individual human being is the pinnacle and the paradigm of the unique that cannot be reduced and cannot be abstracted in a universal. That uniqueness is expressed in the visage of the other and in the bond of responsibility for the other to which the self is elected and in which it experiences itself as unique and irreplaceable. Nevertheless Kantian universal rules are needed. Levinas discusses this in terms of the 'third' that becomes involved in the relation between self and other, and that is also an other, for the self as well as for the first other. And which other then has precedence in my responsibility? If the other does an injustice to the third I cannot let that be for the sake of absolute surrender to the first other, so that this surrender can no longer be absolute. There, in the step from the two-sidedness of self and other to the multiplicity of others, lies a shift from personal ethics to social justice. A step from the uniqueness of the other to equality of everyone under the law. The asymmetry of unconditional responsibility disappears and reciprocity appears.

Levinas struggles with this tension and never completely resolves it. The idea of justice and its contents are not elaborated. Of crucial importance remains the claim that the rights of people are in the first place rights not of the self but of the other. Justice and the law are not a social contract necessitated by the threat of war of all against all (as Hobbes proposed), rather they emerge from a feeling of responsibility for the other. Equality under the law is needed for justice but we must not forget that it does not do justice to the uniqueness of individuals. Where the other is concerned we remain anarchists at heart. The law must not forget its inspiration and ideal from the responsibility of individual to individual. In that sense justice has a 'bad consciousness' of never quite achieving its ideal, and it must remain aware of its shortcomings and stay open for improvement. The Levinasian relation to the other must be maintained as a source of inspiration and a standard for personal relations and for social justice.

How can we ensure that law and justice, with all the institutions and power holders associated with them, remain inspired by the responsibility of the self for every suffering of the unique other? According to Levinas it is a task for 'prophetic voices' to remind the powerful: 'one sometimes hears

them in the cries that rise from the folds of politics that, independently from official institutions, defend “human rights”, sometimes in the songs of poets; sometimes simply in the press and in the public spaces of liberal states’ (Levinas 1991b, p. 203). And where justice can never be complete, the ‘small good’ that people can individually and personally muster for each other creeps into the holes that justice cannot fill (ibid., p. 242). The disappearance of the asymmetry of responsibility in the law need not keep people from bringing that asymmetry of responsibility back into their conduct and their charity (Guwy 2008, p. 68).

Levinas (1993, p. 215) also adds the following argument. Let us compare the two cases of (i) man is wolf to man and (ii) we need institutions to curtail violence; both with the Levinassian principle that the self has an unconditional responsibility for the other and that institutions limit that responsibility. The second, Levinassian case has the advantage that protest against the institutions is based on wanting to take more responsibility, while in the first case protest is a plea for more room for violence.

### Development

The line of thought as discussed had emerged already in the early work of Levinas, for instance in *Totality and Infinity*. There, the self is initially given in its enjoyment of sense impressions and a ‘pagan’ celebration of life, but it becomes ensnared and constricted in itself and in the need of an opening to the other to escape from itself. Earlier I mentioned the notion of escape (‘evasion’) from the self that Levinas (1982) had proposed before. So here the other stands opposite to the self.

In his later main work *Other than Being, or Beyond Existence*<sup>2</sup> the other is part of the self from the beginning, preceding all consciousness. Here Levinas rejects the earlier notion of ‘evasion’ because that presupposes a free self that is constituted in itself, from which it could will to escape, which Levinas now denies (Levinas 1978, p. 177, footnote 1). Now responsibility for the other precedes all encounters (Bernasconi 2002, p. 242). That responsibility is not imposed or demanded by the other, but lies in us: ‘bonded to others before being bonded to one’s own body’ (ibid., p. 96). The self is from the beginning marked by conscience, a sense of responsibility for the other. This ethic precedes being. It is not a matter of generosity bubbling up from our nature. Our nature lies in our striving to survive, in the *conatus essendi*, which leads us to defend our interests and resources, and where possible to manipulate the other in our self-interest, and to fear that the other will do the same. Levinas does not look down on that and is realistic enough to recognize that this is inevitable. But the human being is also marked (‘inscribed’) by the feeling that the shoe pinches, or that there is a chipped pebble in the shoe (the literal meaning of ‘scruple’), when we strive for survival and neglect or deny the suffering of the other human being in

his or her survival. There lies the ethical appeal. The self does not choose that conscience that is in him or her, but he or she can set it aside and in that there lies an ethical choice (Guwy 2008, pp. 94–6). It is not a matter of voluntary commitment, of free consent, but of something that precedes all intentionality. One cannot not feel it.

Here I want to establish a link with the analysis by Sheets-Johnstone, discussed in Chapter 5, of the emergence of a feeling of self from the ‘rough and tumble play’ of children with each other, from which we develop a feeling of power and weakness, at the same time as recognizing the same in others. Children get to see themselves from experience in bumping into other children and then learn to see and grasp the other, and subsequently they arrive at a deepening of seeing themselves by looking from the eyes of the other. Here the other is not so much the extrapolation of the self but the other way around. Now the feeling for the other is part of human nature, of the ‘being’ of the human being – and that is counter to the view of Levinas.

### Speech

Important also in *Other than Being* is Levinas’s discussion of language or speech. He indicates that language is in the first instance directed from human being to human being before it refers to anything, and this reminds us of the distinction between illocution and proposition, where in the evolutionary development of language as well as in language acquisition in education the first precedes the second. We use language ‘to do things to people’ before or while we convey information.

Levinas speaks of the sequential (diachronic) saying (*le dire*) that always goes beyond what at any moment has been said (*le dit*), which does not do justice to the saying that is ‘betrayed’ in the said, as Levinas formulates it. The said hides the tacit assumptions and roots of meaning from which it arises in saying.

This is reminiscent of the distinction that Gabriel Marcel made between thinking as a process (‘thinking thought’) and its result (‘thought thought’), which formed a source of inspiration for Levinas. Marcel also had a bent towards the dynamics of the process (thinking, saying) more than towards the statics of the result (thought, said). In language the distinction between the saying and the said also strongly reminds me of the distinction that Saussure made between the order of language (*langue*) at any moment (synchronically), where meaning is pinned down, and the living word (*parole*) extending across time (diachronically) in which meaning is formed or shifted (see pp. 000–000). As far as I know Levinas does not refer to Saussure, and this is understandable because after making the distinction between *parole* and *langue* Saussure directed himself to the latter, in the analysis of the structure of language and meaning as a property of the coherence

of meanings between words, and left *parole* alone; while the latter is what Levinas is interested in. I go into this because with Levinas and Marcel I share their interest in the dynamics, shift, development and transformation of thinking and meaning.

In Levinas's analysis the becoming of the saying transcends the being of the said and is of a higher order because it is generative, productive of what is said. Thereby the saying acquires something metaphysical, because how can one say something about the saying if the said cannot do justice to it? Especially here Levinas is engaged in saying the unsayable, which does not always contribute to understandability. Of course he is aware of this (Levinas 1978, p. 242). He is also continually engaged in reformulating his ideas in new variations: his saying again and again tries to go beyond what he said, and in that sense he practises what he preaches.

This problem of lack of clarity does not imply that Levinas is wrong. What he says does appeal to intuition. People feel very well that what is said seldom does justice to its source. For him the visage is the icon of the other as a unique, inexhaustible source of transcendence and the relation with the other entails the saying that goes beyond the said. However, among the plurality of people in society the metaphysics of the saying must return to the order of the said even while it is disfigured in it; and that manifests itself in the inevitable limitations of justice. While the relation between self and other is a matter of the saying in which the said is continually transgressed, in society at any time an intersubjective order must remain said in the practice of which people are equal. As Levinas (1991b, p. 241) said: 'how can we arrive at a comparison of incomparables without alienating visages?'. Here is the problem of universals again.

In Chapter 6 I indicated that our thinking and language are metaphorical down to their roots, and in those metaphors objects often stand for processes. Our thinking is fundamentally 'thingy', it harbours an object bias. It is a matter for debate whether the metaphysics lie in the object metaphors that prejudge our thinking or in speculation about underlying processes that we find difficult to capture in our thingy metaphors. What does not fit in our metaphors is called metaphysical; but perhaps the real metaphysics lies in the metaphors. However, we cannot freely step outside those metaphors no matter how metaphysical they are.

Levinas also strives, as I have done, for universals that are not nailed down in immutable concepts but remain open to shifts. In his words: 'notion of a totalization that every time must begin again, notion of open totality' ('Notion de totalisation toujours à recommencer, notion de totalité ouverte') (Levinas 1995, p. 66). We need universals in the order of the 'said', but we must keep them open to deviance and change in the process of 'saying'. In other words universals are not really universals, in the sense that they are provisional, not eternal. This differs from the thought of Gabriel Marcel, who rejected universals; and this goes too far and does not work

(see pp. 000–000) This gives a reason why I prefer to continue with Levinas rather than with Marcel.

For further understanding of the process by which universals arise and shift I have proposed to employ the ‘cycle of discovery’ that I discussed in Chapter 5. Using it in Chapter 6 I wrote that abstraction from context-bound specificities into universals gives a platform to step away from the established context and into new contexts where universals are de-abstracted, i.e. enriched with contextual specificities that generate new meanings from which new universals are further abstracted. And so on. I wonder whether the hermeneutic circle that I tried to analyse more closely by means of the cycle of discovery might form a model for the saying of Levinas, the process of meaning shifts in dialogue between people. According to that model new meanings arise because people try to fit existing but not identical connotations and visions into each other’s mental frames by helping each other in the process and thereby arriving together at new meanings that both lift them from their existing mental frames and cause those frames to shift. Could we associate this process with the saying, the *dire* of Levinas? For Levinas speaks of ‘a transcendence that withdraws from being while it manifests itself in it’ (1987, p. 23), of a ‘refinding itself in losing itself’ (1987, p. 26) and, more difficult to translate, ‘*se faisant notion en se défaisant*’ (1987, p. 263). He also talked about an ‘iteration of saying’ (Levinas 1993, p. 223). Could the cycle of discovery be a model for that? That would have the advantage of making the saying a bit less unsayable and would clarify its relation to the said.

Levinas (1987, p. 274) posed the challenge to himself to conceptualize a change of the self that does not arise from seeing a need to so change, because that would be an argument based on existing knowledge and motives, while precisely their change is at issue. The cycle I proposed in Chapters 5 and 6 is not primarily a directed search, but an adjustment to experience that happens to you, though it can to some extent be oriented by a gamble on a new context where existing cognition (in the wide sense, including morality) is subjected to novel challenges.

Perhaps I can also state this in yet another way, in terms of the distinction between denotation/extension/reference (what an expression refers to, the truth of it) and connotation/intension/sense (the way we identify, recognize or establish reference). Something that we take as given and existing (to which we refer) can be seen and identified in different ways (sense-making). Extension/reference entails representation, content, the things Levinas tries to get away from, and intension is the finding and the changing of these things. Intension forms an individual field of sense-making with more or less idiosyncratic connotations, personal associations from our own, unique lives. The notion of a chair brings with it the memory of that one chair of your granddad’s, with its curved armrests of dark polished wood and blue velours upholstery fastened with buttons. Intension is open and

forms a repertoire of recollection and association that can be expanded and contracted: we can learn to see and categorize things in new ways and thereby see other things. Can we now perhaps identify extension with the determined, the said, and intension with the process of determination, the saying? Levinas (1993, p. 149) speaks of meaning in the *dire* that always goes beyond the said. Could that be the process of an opening and development of intension that can never be fully captured in extension?

Why is the discussion of *dire* in contrast with *le dit* important? Levinas poses the crucial question as to how we can escape from an extreme, post-modern relativism in which every opinion is as good as any other and no one can lay a claim to ultimate truth, which can lead to indifference, a shrugging off of each other. Earlier I pointed out that precisely because there is no certain, objective knowledge, or that in any case such objectivity cannot be claimed, debate is more important than ever, because the only opportunity we have for correcting our errors lies in the mental constructions of others, along their life paths that differ from ours.

I have mentioned the problem of cultural relativism. The 'West' must renounce its ethnocentric righteousness that has produced a disastrous, inhuman, economic and cultural imperialism. But does that not lead to a cultural relativism where, here also, at the level of societies, everyone can proclaim his or her being right and can reject any criticism as ethnocentric myopia? If people, embedded in cultures of family, community, profession, organization, region and country, must necessarily conform to, and form their thinking and doing according to, those cultures (as conservatives argue) then how can we escape from cultural relativism?

Levinas posed the question and my reading of his answer, partly based on Guibal (2005, p. 153), is as follows. In the individual *dire* (or Saussurian *parole*) we deviate from the established order, at any time (synchronically), of legitimate denotation. With that an individual can escape the order of the cultures to which he or she is tied (but not fettered), in dialogue with another individual from another pattern of cultures, and in that dialogue self and other can build bridges between cultures. In that dialogue, by tapping from our own different fields of intension, we can expand each other's fields or transform them. That requires that we break through the indifference of relativism. And here lies the ethical primacy of openness and concern for the other that Levinas stresses.

Here also lies an answer to the problem of universals, in language as well as in ethics and justice. Tapping from fields of intension that vary between people and situations, in *dire* room is given to the uniqueness of an individual, context-dependent use of words that goes beyond the universal (ibid., p. 158). For the law everyone is equal, but that does not mean the law is always right. It constitutes a temporary and imperfect universal that we need to employ against arbitrariness and cronyism. Differences between people and circumstances emerge in application of the law and that gives

a basis for changing the law. The only universal ethical rule that remains is that of respect, openness and concern for the other, and even there the question may arise if it is subject to exception. The equalizer that is justice remains subordinate to and should be inspired by the uniqueness of individuals and the responsibility of humans for each other. To cite Levinas (1987, p. 248): 'justice remains justice only in a society where there is no distinction between people who stand near and those who stand far, but where also the impossibility remains to pass by the most proximate, where the equality of all is carried by my inequality, because my duties exceed my rights'.

### Nietzsche and Levinas

In his rejection of altruism and self-sacrifice Nietzsche seems an antipode to Levinas. Here I give a summary of the similarities and differences between the two thinkers. At first sight few views are so opposed as those of Nietzsche in his rejection and Levinas in his radical acceptance of responsibility of the self for the other. At second sight there are commonalities. Here I make use of Stauffer and Bergo (2009), and I add to it.

First, both use the perspective of embodied cognition, as I do. Impulses, perceptions and feelings precede cognition and ethics and form the basis for them. Second, for both thinkers the acceptance of suffering is central in ethics. This is inevitable after the 'death of God'. If God was invented as consolation for human vulnerability and mortality and now he is dead, we must find another way to deal with suffering. Third, both see the making of sacrifices for others not as a demand from the other that one must concede as a moral duty, but as something that arises autonomously from inside, not from a limitation of freedom, but either as an overflow from the fullness of life (Nietzsche) or as a deep-seated feeling of responsibility that precedes the self (Levinas). Fourth, both try to say the unsayable, beyond established categories of thought and language. Fifth, both are suspicious of universals that cause a neglect of diverse, individual, unique human beings. Sixth, both try to escape from the limitations of the self (transcendence). Seventh, for both thinkers God and religion, or 'Godservice', are no longer the basis for transcendence. Eighth, for both men identification between people, in reciprocation that results in a merging and equalization, is both impossible and undesirable. Ninth, both turn away from the *conatus essendi*, though in very different ways. Tenth, both (but Levinas more in his earlier work than in his later) take the sensual, feeling and exuberant self as a starting point.

But then begins the big difference. Nietzsche stays there, with the exuberant self, the child, and thinks he can find transcendence from within the autonomous self, from an internally generated fullness, without regard for claims from others or demands for self-constraint, a self that dissociates itself from the other – and in his philosophy he ends up again with the child. Levinas veers away from the self to the other and its ethical call on

the self. For Nietzsche that is treason to the life forces of the self, as in the hypocritical and crippling Christian morality of compassion. For Levinas, however, the ethical call to the other is not an appeal to asceticism, not a denial, but an affirmation of the self in being elected.

Nietzsche stays with human nature but replaces the *conatus essendi* with will to power, the manifestation of the self and its life forces – and that evokes questions of morality. Levinas claims to go beyond human nature in a holy orientation towards the other human being – and that evokes questions of its realism.

According to Nietzsche the self experiences a primitive excitement at the suffering of another, and no one benefits from pity, which only multiplies suffering. For Levinas the suffering of the other is unbearable and brought under the responsibility of the self. For Nietzsche suffering is a condition for the transformation of the self by the self. For Levinas suffering is a condition for ethics and an escape from the self by the suffering of the other. For Nietzsche separation between self and other yields protection of the self in its emergence from itself; for Levinas it opens the self to a going forward. With Nietzsche there sometimes is the possibility of suffering from the suffering of another, though from that the self derives the pleasure of gratitude that is no more than a benevolent form of revenge (see *Daybreak* and Boothroyd 2009, p. 160). Thus, at third sight, in spite of the commonalities between Nietzsche and Levinas, the difference is as big as it appeared at first sight.

With Nietzsche and Levinas I share the perspective of the bodily, physiological, emotional roots of cognition and ethics, the question of what to do with human suffering, and the relinquishing of God as a way out. My position lies between Nietzsche and Levinas. With Nietzsche I want to preserve, not subdue, the life force and creativity of the human being, and I share his 'Dionysian' striving to transcend the self. With Levinas I share the idea that openness to the other forms the foundation of the self and is a source of transcendence of the self. I radically disagree with Nietzsche's often-tacit presupposition that the self can do this by itself. On the other hand in my view Levinas goes too far with his idea of the self as a hostage for the other. In my view the self not only has the right but also wisdom on his or her side to distance him or herself from the other when that seems needed. I even claim that this is a consequence of Levinas's thought itself. I will return to this later.

While Levinas is almost exclusively oriented towards ethics, for other-humanism I also see arguments of cognition and language, and these are so woven together, including with ethics, that I find it hard to say which comes first. Openness to the other yields an opportunity that is both ethical and cognitive. This interweaving of cognition and ethics reflects the interweaving of feelings and cognition discussed in Chapter 5. However, and here I agree again with Levinas, this does not and need not lead to identification. Between self and other there remains cognitive distance.

### Discussion

Let me, before I criticize Levinas, admit that it is quite possible that I have not completely understood him. In his work there are still passages that I had to let pass after three failed attempts at understanding and after consultation of the secondary literature; especially the passages on the conceptualization of time and some of the passages relating to the saying (*dire*). I sometimes had the feeling that the emperor was not wearing clothes and that it was all mystification; but that must be my fault. Levinas often tries to say the unsayable, and there is something to be said for that, though one might not say so. So, my criticism may be based, wholly or partly, on a misconstrual of Levinas. But I do what I can, though a misconstrual could be useful, if it contributes to debate and insight.

Like Nietzsche, Levinas also indulges in hyperbole, with terms like 'infinite' and 'absolute', and as in the case of Nietzsche I can accept that in view of the need to show how different one's own, new account is. Levinas offers extreme standpoints also to make sufficiently forceful opposition to extreme manifestations of evil in humanity, as in Nazism and Stalinism. But exaggeration can lead to caricatures that obstruct understanding. Next to hyperbole in the work of Levinas there is also an ambiguity that can be bothersome.

Levinas repeatedly speaks of the 'infinity' of the other and of our responsibility to him or her. An explanation from Levinas himself is that he derives it from Descartes's idea that the human being has a notion of infinity that with his finite thinking he cannot have conceived of by himself and which therefore must have been given by God, with God himself as the manifestation of that infinity (Levinas 1991b, p. 227). In my view it is the other way around. We have a keen sense of our own finitude, we try to go beyond that by conceiving an unknown infinity, as something we do not have, and call that God. Levinas says that the human being is by nature an atheist and then receives from God an inspiration for orientation towards the other. Here, also in my view, it is the other way around. The human being, from his or her fear of death and despair from suffering, has a natural urge to seek God and then finds him by invention. In a certain sense Levinas now replaces God by the other human being (Putnam 2002, p. 42), and then the infinity of God is transferred to the other. The inspiration to surrender to the other is 'the voice of God' (e.g. in Levinas 1995, p. 134), and the other, or the relation, obtains a sense of infinity.

The infinity, or more precisely unboundedness, of the relation with the other refers to the ongoing transgression of any boundary that is imposed. The other represents infinity in the sense that time and time again he or she lifts us beyond our limitations and we can never grasp him or her fully. Cognitive distance can decrease, but not to zero. In Levinas's own words (1995, p. 72): 'the face to face is a relationship in which the I liberates itself

from itself (and this) merits the adjective of infinite'. We never reach the point where we can say we have paid enough attention to the other. We accept the idea of the other as unbounded and never to be fully grasped, that is as a source of transcendence and object of awe.

The infinite and absolute orientation towards the other also refers, especially I think, to a stepping away from the drive to survival of the human being and the setting aside of all self-interest as a condition for compassion – what Levinas also calls 'holiness', which to him means the stepping out of one's nature, one's 'being'. I will presently show why I disagree with this.

What are we to think of Levinas's radical stepping beyond ontology and 'being'? There is ambiguity in his use of the term 'being'. Sometimes it means thinking in terms of 'presence to consciousness'; other times it means thinking in terms of 'representations' in the mind. In thinking there is more than contemplation: it is a part of doing, and that knowledge does not consist of representations in the sense of 'mirroring' the world. But I do think that there is mental activity of structuration (of neural ties) for which experience supplies elements and impulses. Levinas (1993, p. 235) rejects thinking in terms of 'experience' that he equates with 'comprehension', i.e. the reception in a static mental structure. But in my view experience is dynamic, something that transforms mental structure. Reception (assimilation) is accompanied by transformation (accommodation) of receiving structures (see pp. 000–000).

Sometimes with Levinas 'being' denotes the supposed nature of the human being as exclusively striving for survival: the *conatus essendi*. He says that the human being is also 'inscribed' by a conscience, an unease with our natural urge towards egotism, which somehow is outside our nature and our 'ontology'. I think that here he is forced to go beyond 'being' because of his assumption that any urge towards altruism, benevolence, responsibility for the other, the scruple, goes against human nature that consists only of the urge towards survival. Thus the scruple must come from outside 'being', as an 'inscription' that must come from God, since where else could it come from if it is not part of human nature? However, Levinas rejects God in any usual sense, though he now needs him to skirt the egotistic nature of humanity. The 'inscription' of the 'scruple' is what remains from the idea of divine creation, though it is a creation against the nature of the human being (Guwy 2008, p. 220) – and that is a notion I cannot make sense of.

I reject the claim that altruism goes against human nature. The urge for survival is a corner stone of evolutionary theory, though in the modern form of that theory it is recognized that next to an instinct for self-interest there is also an instinct for solidarity, for altruism, which then is also part of our nature and of our 'ontology'.<sup>3</sup> I will present the arguments in the final chapter of this book. With this I reject what should perhaps be seen as the core of the philosophy of Levinas. I admit that in an emergency self-interest mostly wins over altruism; but we do have an instinct for the latter

as well, on which we can build. Human beings have both good and evil in their nature, and it is up to us to use cultural means to further the good and curtail the evil.

According to Levinas the 'exteriority' of the other is 'irreducible' and 'absolute' in the sense that other and self will never become one: there will always be distance. The other is 'absolutely other' (Levinas 1991b, p. 200) in the sense that he or she is unique, i.e. not to be subsumed under any universal. This seems an acceptable idea. If the claim that the other is absolutely different means that the self can never fully absorb the other, then that also is acceptable. But it cannot be the case that there is no commonality between self and other. No matter how much one opens oneself to the other, if there is no affinity at all, no adequate 'absorptive capacity', and the other cannot aid absorption with suitable metaphors, then one can hardly absorb anything from the other. Thus the other can never be 'absolutely' different. Levinas (1991b, pp. 70–1) also claims that the 'passiveness' of the self is 'infinite' and 'absolute'. But that cannot be. One will have to make an effort to understand the other and to help him or her to understand you, and in that sense there can be no complete 'passiveness'.

In Chapter 6 I claimed that language is deeply rooted in metaphors from daily experience with objects in the world, in the fight for survival. These are particularly misleading regarding abstract concepts (such as self, other, knowledge, meaning), for here we suffer from an 'object bias', the inclination to think of abstract notions in terms of material objects. In that sense I am also sceptical about our notions of ontology, but this is not, I believe, what Levinas means. Being misled by misplaced metaphors leaves room for improvement in our conceptualization of what is, e.g. in terms of processes instead of objects, of relations instead of disconnected individuals. I find it difficult to talk about things which we say do not exist: for me that means 'they are not there' in whatever form of conceptualization. I can no longer follow what is being talked about. Perhaps, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, we do best here by saying nothing.

I agree, as I said earlier, with the idea that the self needs the other for its own identity, to escape from its prejudices of knowledge and ethics, and to evoke the good in it. But in my view that does not necessarily imply that we set aside the idea of the self as a being, provided we see it (also) as a process and not (only) as an object, as Levinas said. The self is both object and process. If we see the being of the human being as a process of becoming, would that not be part of our ontology? And if becoming requires interaction, doesn't ethics also become part of it?

I am closer to the early Levinas, where the other stands outside the self and offers the self a source of escape from the suffocation of the self as a prison. In his later philosophy the other still remains a principle of 'exteriority' but which also is somehow interiorized in me. Levinas (1993, p. 227) says that the other is not in me but wrenches me loose from myself.

Here I fall back on the reading that we have a divine 'inscription' in us that orients us towards the other, against our nature.

I wonder if perhaps the greatest significance of Levinas lies in the perspective that his philosophy of the other yields a cure for narcissism as an inner emptiness: not only, and perhaps not in the first place, for a reduction of an excess of self, but for a replenishment of self, the filling of a void. By submitting itself to the other and opening itself up to its opposition the self may learn to adjust its prejudices and escape from its delusions. If Lasch (1991) is correct in his analysis of narcissism as the inability – going back to the traumatic experience of a baby that discovers that it cannot command the sources of protection and satisfaction of its desires – to accept limitations of the self and of the environment in the satisfaction of desires, then a philosophy of the other serves to underpin an awareness of one's limitations and an escape of the other from one's demands and delusions of power and grandeur. But perhaps we can also say that by bringing the other into the self the self can fill the void of the self, populating it with more than the delusional images of the self. How different is this from identification in the sense that an idol is appropriated and transformed to fit the phantasies of the self?

In Chapter 5 I presented an idea for learning where at any moment the self processes experience by assimilating it into existing categories (that form absorptive capacity) but which in that process arrives at a transformation of those categories in accommodation. Levinas objects to the notion of assimilation, seen as a form of grasping, forcing the other into the categories one has, as subjugation, an exercise of power. I sympathize with that, but he goes further and calls it a deed of 'violence and denial of the other' (Levinas 1991b, p. 20) – which is another unhelpful hyperbole. He does not recognize the accommodation that accompanies assimilation. If we go for hyperbole we might as well reverse the claim and say that in accommodation the other 'overpowers' the self. He says that we can only learn what we know, that the object of our knowledge surrenders itself and is grabbed and appropriated by the self (Levinas 1991b, p. 134). This is an odd view of learning. In fact, I propose, the relation between self and other is a process of adjustment to the other, in a shift or break of categories, triggered by imperfect or failed attempts to fit the other into those categories. Fitting in fails from opposition by the other and thereby yields adjustment. Dialogue is not only agreement but also creative disagreement, creative cognitive destruction, in debate and moral confrontation.

Levinas himself pleads for 'passiveness' of the self: no longer to grasp and appropriate but to accept influence. The other offers resistance and thereby forms a source of accommodation. Levinas pleads for us not to conquer opposition by the other but to appeal to it. I fully agree with this: that enables accommodation. This does not replace assimilation but accompanies it, follows from it. Rationality of fitting in leads to what one might call the superrationality of learning, adjustment and transformation. The argument

does lead to the Levinassian (and Kantian) conclusion that we should not see the other as an object but as a unique spiritual and sense-making being which can lift us out of ourselves, not just as a means but also as a goal in itself.

Tension remains in the large contrast between the Levinassian relationship with the single other and the reality of relations in society. There is something to be said for setting up ethics with an ideal, a utopia, that in the reality of society cannot be realized but functions as an ideal to strive for, comparable to the ideal of democracy that also cannot be fully realized. But if the distance between ideal and reality becomes too large the ideal loses force and relevance. The danger is that the holiness of the ideal relationship soon turns into hypocrisy, as was forcefully shown by Nietzsche. And, while Levinas says that for the sake of justice 'incomparable individuals need to be compared', he leaves us with a riddle, without showing us how this might be approached.

In the practice of society the asymmetry, radicality and one-sidedness of responsibility of self for the other disappears, Levinas admits. But, he says, the ideal relation must remain a source of criticism of ever-imperfect justice and a source of inspiration for the adjustment of this justice and for the individual 'small goodness' in which human beings in their individuality go further in compassion than what justice demands or even permits. There is much to be said for this. But Levinas does not indicate how the relationship between self and multiple others then works, how the 'highness' and 'holiness' of the ideal relationship can still have anything to do with the realities of society.

In the following chapters I shall try to take some steps on that path. Developing and wisely dealing with trust and its limitations is a central issue. I think that for viability of good relationships that strive for the ideal it is necessary to show that responsibility for the other, though short of becoming absolute, goes further than self-interest but need not be in conflict with it, because openness and concern for the other form a basis for transcending the self, cognitively and ethically, which contributes to the flourishing of life and sense-making. The striving for the realization of potential, the flourishing of life, inspired in part by Nietzsche but already indicated by Aristotle, requires transcendence of the self, and for that the self needs the other and benevolence towards the other. Levinas would no doubt reject this approach as oriented too much to the self, because he thinks that such benevolence is not in the nature of the human being.

I don't think that altruism entails a duty to an unconditional relationship with everyone or anyone. If after a sincere opening no empathy arises, and a fortiori when antipathy arises, one may still not deny the other as a human being with its rights and dignity, and its unboundedness ('infinity' with Levinas), but one may decline a relationship with the other, or so I will argue. In the well-known terminology of Hirschman (1970): it is wise to commit to 'voice', but at its limit stands the option of 'exit'.

My main point of criticism of Levinas is this. If the other in its opposition to me and in the ethical appeal to me to have concern for it is a source of transcendence for me, then I should also grant the same to it, in my opposition and appeal to it. I should be passive in the sense of being receptive to it but also active in helping it to receive me. Paradoxically perhaps, it would be egotistic of me to completely subject myself to the other. Nietzsche resonates here, but in a way that he did not intend. Altruism is not being nice to each other but offering opposition to each other. That cannot be reconciled with one-sided and unconditional surrender to the other. This reciprocity perhaps brings me closer to Martin Buber. But I agree with Levinas that the relationship remains asymmetrical, that responsibility for the other is often automatic, unreflected, that we can give without expecting anything in return, that distance remains and people do not merge. Friendship is not always being friendly; love is not being lovely. Our responsibility for the other does not require or even allow subjugation or self-sacrifice but requires commitment to mutual concern, inspiration and opposition. In our openness to the other we must try to set aside our present thinking and feeling, or put it between brackets, and avoid as much as possible arguing from ourselves, though that is never entirely possible. This is both an ethical and a cognitive requirement. However, we reach a point where we hold on to our own intellectual and ethical conviction. The self, dependent as it is on the other, and committed to the humanity of the other, responsibility for the other, remains responsible also for its own life, for its flourishing, in the same way as applies to the other. People should not imprison others nor let themselves be imprisoned by them.

So in part I return to Nietzsche. Like Schopenhauer he approved of pride, the self-approbation based on one's own conviction, and condemned vanity, the seeking of approbation from others. It is clear that approval from others is often a chimera, because others are mostly unable and uninterested in making reliable judgements. On the other hand, self-approbation is often delusional, because the self also mostly fails to make a reliable judgement of the self. The solution to this dilemma is that one should not narcissistically seek approbation from others but, on the contrary, opposition and critique, to correct one's errors about oneself. But in the end one has only one's own conviction to act on, however imperfectly corrected it may be.

To sum up, I reject the fundamental assumption by Levinas that only the urge to survival and corresponding egotism form the nature of humanity, so that God must inspire any altruism against our nature. I claim that by nature, as part of our heritage from evolution, the human being also has an inclination to altruism, though often it is weaker than the inclination to egotism. I go along with Levinas's denial of God in all the usual connotations, and his claim that the usual belief in God distracts us from the relation to the other human being that should be central. I go along with the idea that ethics is primary philosophy, though perhaps for other

reasons than given by Levinas, namely because ethics precedes interaction, which precedes language and cognition. I go along with the idea that the other is an inexhaustible source that can never be fully grasped and is an object of awe, replacing God. I feel drawn to the idea of a form of holiness in the relationship to the other, but then a holiness that is not religious in the sense of offering a connection with something supernatural, superhuman, but at most religious in the sense of a connection with the human that transcends the self. I go along with the idea that between self and other asymmetry remains and self and other can never become the same. I share Levinas's view of the issue of universals and justice and I sympathize with his discussion of the saying and the said.

How can I agree with a number of important points of Levinas while I disagree with what is perhaps his most central claim that we must go beyond being? This is possible because in opposition to Levinas I claim that altruism also is part of the nature of humanity, and that therefore there is no need to go beyond being or to God for it. After this I can follow him in putting altruism and ethics as primary – and this needs to be elaborated.

# 9

## Otherhumanism

In this chapter threads of previous chapters come together concerning the relationship between self and other with regard to freedom, cognition, language and ethics. They converge in an argument which I call 'otherhumanism', which is a search for a transcendence that is immanent (within life) and horizontal (between people). The self needs the other for the flourishing of life; for the highest possible level of freedom; for a liberation from narcissism, transcendence above the self, cognition, language and ethics – in their mutual connection. The only hereafter that we have is what we leave behind in the world; and it is a part of the flourishing of life to contribute to it. This chapter is about the arguments for otherhumanism and how it might work. In the last chapter I will ask whether otherhumanism is not only desirable but also viable, given the limitations of humanity and society.

### Arguments for otherhumanism

Why otherhumanism? How does it work? Here I give a summary of preceding chapters. In Chapters 1 and 3 I indicated why we should try to escape from the egotism and narcissism that plague our society. In Chapter 2 I indicated why in my view religion with a God does not provide a solution. I made a distinction between theistic religion or 'godservice' and religion in a wider sense, defined as belief in a tie of the human being to something supernatural or superhuman or beyond the self. One can have a religion without God. One can have immanent transcendence from within life.

Religion with a god as creator, all powerful, all knowing, providential and benevolent, and with a personal afterlife for the self, provides solace for suffering, vulnerability and the anguish of mortality – but at a high price of hypocrisy and a suppression of life forces (as Nietzsche showed), a misuse by political manipulation, and a fundamentalism that leads to imperialism, fanaticism and terror. It lends itself to an unholy alliance with a biologically rooted instinct of mistrust and hatred of outsiders, of people who do not belong to one's group. As Levinas argued, theistic religion distracts us

from our responsibility for the other human being. It allows us to shove responsibility onto God and to reach across the other to the comfort of our personal relation to God. God and a hereafter distract us from the need to make the best of the only life that we get. In the absence of God and a hereafter only the other human being remains as a source of transcendence, presenting a hereafter in the form of posterity in this world alone. The question then is whether and how people can be good without help from God. God can help, but is he indispensable?

In Chapter 8 I indicated that after Levinas's denial of God in any customary sense his account of the relation between self and other still has a religious tone in that the other is seen as higher and impossible to grasp fully and in that sense carries a 'trace' of God, an echo of the 'voice of God'.

Godservice is not the only source of fanaticism and violence. These are also found in the wake of political ideologies. The common source of evil in my view lies in Platonic dreams of the absolute, universal, eternal and pure, beyond the messiness and chaos of reality and humanity in the world. They also induce awe and inspiration and a sense of transcendence – and therefore tremendously alluring and are all the more dangerous for it. Adopting these absolutes and claiming privileged access to them, such people do not regard the ideals of others as being merely wrong but as being outside the good – and hence evil – and so requiring their extermination to preserve the purity of the absolute.

In Chapters 1 and 2 I indicated that the (radical) Enlightenment – with its universalistic pretensions, such as the notion of the universal human being, reason, universal laws and principles of order, a universal good and universal ethical rules – also neglected the diversity of humanity and subjected society to universal ideals by which it became vulnerable to totalitarian ideologies. If the spiritual is associated with the universal, and the universal with the eternal that escapes death, then it is a small step to associate diversity with death, which we want to avoid – hence diversity needs to be eliminated. At present we see how the universal, the great equalizer, the box in which all must fit, locks people up and reduces their individualities to stereotypes.

We should face and accept death in order to accept and value the non-universal and temporary uniqueness of specific people in specific conditions. Perhaps we should recognize that literature, with its art of the specific, takes precedence over philosophy with its dreams of universality.

In Chapter 3 I gave an account of the history of the disconnected self to see what we are up against. Our preoccupation with the self is the outcome of a variety of lines of development in the Reformation, Renaissance, Enlightenment and Romanticism, and the result is deeply etched into our Western culture and not easy to remove.

From Chapter 4 onwards I began to give answers. In Chapter 4 I argued that the self needs others to achieve the highest possible level of freedom: the freedom to escape from its own prejudices and discover what it ought

to want. A paradox here is that one must surrender some autonomy and self-directedness to be sufficiently open to the other, in order to reach a higher degree of freedom. Alone, that is difficult to achieve: one needs an external source.

In Chapter 5, I argued for an 'embodied cognition' where, counter to Descartes, body and mind, feelings and rationality, are intertwined, and where cognition and identity are 'constructed' in interaction with the physical, social and cultural environment. As a result, people will differ in their perception, knowledge and values to the extent that they have developed along different life paths, in different environments. This cognitive distance makes people diverse and unique. Such difference yields a problem in terms of lack of mutual understanding, but also an opportunity. If objective knowledge is impossible then testing our insights on what 'others have made of it' is the only chance we have to correct our errors. The other is needed not only to escape from phantom certainties. In the case of scepticism the other may be needed to be sceptical of our scepticism.

I also summarized a theory of discovery as a cycle in which application of existing knowledge and competence to novel contexts, with new challenges and opportunities, can lead to new knowledge and competence. By 'assimilating' experience into existing cognitive structures one can arrive at their transformation ('accommodation'). This insight was applied for a deeper insight in how communication, by fitting each other's different insights into each other's cognitive structures, can lead to their transformation. This yields a more developed perspective on the importance of the other for learning by the self.

In Chapter 6 I used Wittgenstein's argument of the impossibility of a private language. Meaning not only enables communication but also requires it. The self needs the other to establish meaning and for making sense. Important also is the old problem of universals. Universals are needed to achieve generalization and logical and causal inference, and, using that, prediction, design and planning. They are also needed for rules of justice. But they carry the danger of neglect and subjugation of individual cases, of individual people with specific endowments in specific situations. Universals derive their meaning from specific cases and, as abstractions from them, are only temporary, forming a platform for their application in novel contexts by which they and their meanings shift. This perspective on the formation and change of meaning connects with the cognitive theory of the cycle of discovery discussed in Chapter 5. Knowledge and meaning change by application in novel contexts. The implication is that semantics, the theory of meaning and truth, is subordinate to pragmatics, the use of language in specific contexts. Another fundamental point is that our language is shot through with metaphors, in which we derive categories of thought and concepts in language from our primary experience with things in daily life. This has been etched in us during evolution, or so I propose. But these

categories, derived from objects and their mechanics in space and time, are fundamentally misleading when applied to more abstract notions of knowledge, feelings, language, experience, identity and morality. We should face the possibility that the whole of philosophy may be one great deception by ill-fitting metaphors that have misdirected our thought.

In Chapter 7 I discussed Nietzsche. His significance for this book is threefold. First, it is a warning not to revert, through a philosophy of the other, to a morality that is hypocritical and suppresses the forces of life for discovery, creation and creative destruction. Second, Nietzsche's indomitable criticism is a source of inspiration for the demasking of prejudice and the transcendence of the self. In Nietzsche I also encounter the suspicion of universals that neglect or suppress individuals, which I share. Third, I value Nietzsche as an opponent, as a position to push away from through his (mostly implicit) assumption that the self can rise above itself without the need for any other.

In Chapter 8 I discussed Levinas, as a polar opposite to Nietzsche, and his radical opening of the self to the other human being. For Levinas the other replaces God as a source of transcendence. According to my interpretation the resistance of Levinas in his earlier work to thinking in terms of the existence of things in the world (ontology) seems comparable, though not identical, to my account of the 'object bias' in our thought, the deeply rooted inclination to see experience that is not related to objects in terms of objects and their movement in space and time. The danger of this is, in particular, that we see the other human being, or his or her knowledge, as an object that we can manipulate and appropriate. In his later work Levinas discusses the tension between what is said in language (*le dit*) and its saying (*le dire*). According to my interpretation this is comparable to my discussion of the tension between universals and individuals. We say things in terms of universals but thereby freeze the process in which meaning develops in the saying, in the use of meaning that shifts meaning, and thereby we neglect the individuals hidden behind the universals and their importance for the shift of meanings. In exiting from Plato's cave to contemplate universal ideas we become estranged from humanity.

Central in this book is the position that Levinas takes in the relation between self and other. He is extremely radical: ethics is primary philosophy. The other makes an appeal to the self to take unconditional responsibility for the suffering of the other, and this takes precedence over cognition and identity. This is not reasoned from any point of departure, goal or obligation of the self, but precedes any deliberation. In his earlier work the other is seen as a source of escape from the self that is ill at ease in its being locked up in the self. This point is fundamental and I adopt it from Levinas: the other is a source of transcendence of the self.

In summary, my argument for otherhumanism is as follows. Any hereafter as life after death is an illusion. The hereafter is not you yourself but the

people and their environment that you leave behind. If you want to make your life worthwhile and dedicate yourself to the hereafter then the only way to do this is by dedication to others and to the society of the future. This can be done at many levels: the individual (children, grandchildren, family, friends), the organizational or institutional (school, business, charity) and the societal (culture, science, politics). Dedication to others is not at the expense of yourself and life. The self needs others to escape from its illusory certainties, as well as its doubt, to achieve the highest possible level of freedom, to achieve its potential, to develop and transcend itself and thereby to utilize the unique gift of life. The other is needed for us to escape from the narcissism that is characteristic of our time, by showing and making us accept our limitations, to deflate our self delusion, to surrender the urge to manipulate others, to fill the emptiness of our souls with other things than chimeras of ourselves, and to derive satisfaction from the space we allow for others and from our contributions to their development. This leads to a notion of the flourishing of life that goes beyond the life of the self, not in a claim to any absolute, universal good beyond the world, but in a participation and contribution to the flourishing of others, during and after our life.

### The good life

I do not believe in a morality ordained by any God, but I do subscribe to a form of ethics. Ethics is about what the good life and good conduct are, and that question goes back to the ancient Greeks and Romans (and beyond). I do want to talk about morality, about right and wrong, and about justice, but, as argued also by Taylor (2011), morality makes sense only as part of an ethics: a 'should' is acceptable and understood when conducive to a 'good'. I take that to be fairly evident. What is happiness (*eudaimonia*), and what is the role of virtue in that? According to Epicurus and his followers, seeking happiness is itself virtuous. According to the Stoics only virtue yields true happiness, and for them virtue is life according to reason and a suppressing of emotion as a source of tribulation. According to Kant virtue and happiness are separate categories that can both be sought but do not coincide.

Search for the good life has been blamed for being self-absorbed and elitist. It is seen as elitist in its tendency to focus on spiritual or intellectual activity that is supposedly inaccessible to the poorly educated. I doubt that the latter is the case. I think that 'simple' people often have a better sense of the spiritual than highly educated people. I admit, however, that with Aristotle the notion was elitist: he assumed a hierarchy of beings with different potential for which enlightenment was accessible only to the few. I assume that every human being in principle has that potential. That is why paying tax for education is part of the good life. Education is part of the good life, as a goal in itself, apart from its instrumental value for individuals

in raising a future income, and that is part of the reason why it is justified to pay for much of it out of tax. Concerning the accusation of self-absorption, I go in the opposite direction, arguing that an intellectual and spiritual focus on the good life requires other-directedness.

It has been a long tradition in philosophy – with Epicurus and his followers, to a greater extent with the Stoics (such as Seneca), and later especially with Schopenhauer – not to seek happiness in pleasure and excitement, but in the avoidance of pain, danger, risk, ambition and dependence on others. This is the miserable ideal of what Schopenhauer himself called the ‘half life’ (in his *Aphorisms for Wisdom of Life*, 2010 [1851]). According to him life is in the grip of a will whose satisfaction is never reached. Every time we experience pleasure there is a new desire; and if desires are ever satisfied we fall into deep boredom. The only happiness that can be achieved lies in the avoidance of danger and dependence on others. The blind are happy because they are not bothered by all that can be seen, Schopenhauer says.

I do agree with Schopenhauer where he says that we should not obsess about what we don’t have but should count our blessings concerning the pains we are saved from, and that boredom can best be relieved in spiritual, artistic, intellectual activity. But it is nonsense that every pleasure should lead to the pursuit of further insatiable desire. One can enjoy things in moderation, have a rest then later enjoy them anew. Here I would sooner follow Aristotle: everything in moderation; though Nietzsche also to some extent. Ambition and entrepreneurship carry the risk of failure and danger, but also the chance of new possibilities and insights – and suffering is a basis for learning. One has to take risk in striving to fulfil the potential of one’s life, especially since it is the only life one gets. And that I also find in Aristotle.

I do not agree with Aristotle and Nietzsche where they, like Schopenhauer, the Stoics and many others, claim that one is happy in so far as one is self-sufficient, in no need of others (*autarky*). Schopenhauer goes so far as to say that there is freedom only in loneliness. Earlier, Montaigne and Rousseau, in his later life, were tempted by this. But that in my view is the freedom of a prison one has locked oneself into.

Sloterdijk (2009) also goes to extremes. He claims that the entire evolution of the human being, in its nature and culture, is an ongoing development of immune systems, that become progressively inclusive, in an striving to control an ever widening range of threats, in larger, more comprehensive social systems, of people, communities, organizations, nations and states. That striving for immunity, he claims, is the core, the essence of humanity; the human being is a *homo immunologicus*.

I claim, to the contrary, that especially in the craving for spiritual and intellectual enlightenment one needs the opposition of others. I do grant that the more knowledge, experience and insight one has built up, the more difficult it becomes to find someone who can offer something new. However, that loneliness is not something you seek but something that

befalls you. You still need others but cannot find them. Dialogue then becomes one-sided with the work of dead thinkers.

It is customary to distinguish three kinds of ethics. The first stream is 'virtue ethics', following Aristotle. According to him virtues have no other goal than themselves, they form part of happiness and are not instruments for something else. I leave aside for the moment what the source of those virtues is: human nature or some transcendent deity or spirit. Here the good is an activity, such as work, production, creation or helping others.

Own development and the happiness of others are not contrary, as Kant suggested, but complement and enable each other. The classical Greek view of virtue has been interpreted as action in agreement with laws of nature, and that would leave little room for freedom. But in Aristotle I read that the good life and happiness consist in the good development of the potential one has, especially spiritually. There the human being grasps its freedom.

Aristotle allows for multiple goods, and those goods may and often do come into conflict with each other. Doing good is also complicated by the fact that conditions for action, motives and preferences vary and develop, which causes a great deal of unpredictability in actions and events. As a result of multiple goods and unpredictability life frequently presents dilemmas.

Virtue for Aristotle is doing what is fitting. The virtue of the eye is to see well. For humanity it is especially the activity of the mind. The good life and happiness consist in the development of the potential one has, especially spiritual potential, and the striving for excellence in the realization of potential and in the use of reason. Material conditions and pleasure are also part of the good life, but in moderation.

There are multiple virtues. For example, in life we are confronted with difficult choices between liberty and justice, justice and mercy, self-interest and altruism, rules and exceptions (cf. Taylor 2011, p. 348). A leading principle for the trade-off between them is moderation, in finding a middle way between extremes. It is not a priori clear that one can trade off virtues against each other to arrive at a single measure of utility or consistent preferences.<sup>1</sup> For Aristotle courage, moderation and justice were core virtues. I believe different times and circumstances require the prominence of different virtues. My preference is for virtues of benevolence, extending benefit of the doubt, openness, sincerity, commitment, moral courage, justice and (following Aristotle and Spinoza and Nietzsche) the realization of human potential, human flourishing. Like Spinoza and Nietzsche I do not see virtue as ordained by any God or other transcendent being or spirit. I do think that the human being has a craving for a transcendent, for something larger and beyond the self and its life. I think that can be found in nature and in humanity, in awe for the other being, and in a dedication to a hereafter in the form of what we leave behind after life. In my view the key criterion of virtue is the contribution to the flourishing of life, with the crucial proviso

that the flourishing of the life of the self requires and to a large extent consists in the flourishing of others.

Do values yield a toolbox, then, where ethics is left for post-modern grabs? Does each culture, even each individual, have its idiosyncratic ethics, without any universal or shared basis? Aristotle connected the virtues to underlying, fundamental experiences in the human life that people share, more or less, and he thereby achieved a certain generality while preserving variation of specific conditions. People have shared limits and potential, in a shared evolution with corresponding instincts and psychological dispositions, natural needs of the body, subjection to laws of nature, and regularities or 'logics' in social structures and processes. Similar basic emotions find different cultural expressions.

For justice I do not follow the contractarian tradition (Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Rawls) for reasons indicated earlier. Justice goes beyond a balance of mutual advantage between agents of roughly equal power and capacities. Apart from 'technical' problems in dilemmas of collective choice, justice becomes salient especially when there is a lack of reciprocity and asymmetrical power. I prefer the 'capabilities tradition' (Nussbaum 2006) where justice entails that people have access to what is needed for human dignity and human flourishing, for realizing human virtues. Nussbaum lists the following: life, health, bodily integrity, senses/imagination/thought (by means of education, freedom of expression, freedom of religion), emotions, practical reason (conception of the good), affiliation (empathy, respect), other species (concern for animals and nature), play, control over one's environment (political participation, property, employment, entering relationships). I would not want to commit myself to precisely this list, and I can imagine variations, but it gives a good indication. One solution to the problem of universals that Nussbaum offers is that while the right to a minimum of each of these capabilities is universal, the extent to which people can realize these capabilities and the ways in which access to them can be created vary with individuals and the situations they are in.

Beyond individual capabilities justice requires solidarity. In present complex societies, with extreme division of labour and connected markets, tensions between private and collective interests, unpredictable and unintended consequences of complex interactions between people and adverse effects of markets, people are subjected to systems they have little influence on and that are the product of collective conduct, so that there is a collective duty to help victims of the system.<sup>2</sup> The system can also serve as a platform for individual development, profit and flourishing, though people should realize that in their success they stand on ground that is drenched with the blood of previous generations battling for rights and freedom and they use a system built by the genius and labour of previous generations. Neither success nor failure are completely one's own doing.

A second stream in ethics is oriented towards the consequences of conduct, such as the greatest good for the greatest number of people. According to Epicurus, and later the utilitarians, such as Jeremy Bentham, virtue is no more than an instrument for that. For the utilitarians it was the greatest utility for the greatest number of people, with the implication that individual utility must sometimes be sacrificed for the good of all. This also applied to Adam Smith, who is seen as the father of economic science. Later economists mostly reduced utility to self-interest of the autonomous, disconnected self, without altruism, and regardless of the interests of others. Utility or pleasure can be material but also spiritual, in knowledge or art, in friendship or pleasure in the happiness of others, or in ethical behaviour. Spinoza was a consequentialist in that he also saw ethics as oriented towards the natural striving of the human being towards maintenance, realization and perfection of the self (*conatus*). I agree with that, though I stress the realization and perfection of the self, and I maintain, not in line with Spinoza and Nietzsche, that for that we need others, and that next to a natural urge towards self-maintenance (Spinoza) and expression or manifestation of the self (Nietzsche) we also have a natural urge towards social legitimacy and altruism, within the limits dictated by survival. This, I propose, provides a basis for the virtues I suggested before.

So, there are three problems with utilitarianism. First, there are multiple dimensions of utility (here we meet the multiple goods of Aristotle), which are not necessarily commensurable or reducible to a single unified measure. As a result, preferences may not be transitive. Second, self-interest is not so easily aligned with collective interest in problems of collective choice. Third, people do not naturally strive only for self-interest.

Are virtues, then, ends in themselves or tools for human flourishing? I propose that they are both. Virtues of benevolence, extending benefit of the doubt, openness, sincerity, commitment, moral courage and justice contribute to human flourishing but are also part of that flourishing.

A third stream in ethics is oriented towards universal moral duties, rights and rules ('deontology') to which one must adhere regardless of the consequence and which apply equally for all people under the same circumstances. One can strive for happiness, but that does not coincide with virtue. The great example is the ethics of Immanuel Kant. One does good because on the ground of rational deliberation and in freedom one finds that it should be so. One can find satisfaction in it but that is not the reason for doing it. According to the 'categorical imperative' an action, say cheating for profit, is to be judged good only if one would want it to apply as a universal rule.

Following Aristotle I am sceptical concerning universal rules that apply regardless of differences between people and regardless of conditions. I accept the principle that one may at times use people as means to ends but one must always also see them as ends in themselves. However, if

a psychopath threatened to murder my family must I then also see him as an end in himself?

I do appreciate that universality of a moral rule serves to preclude the ducking of responsibility by claiming special conditions, and to avoid cronyism and discrimination that seeks to apply rules selectively. I do accept, in particular, that justice requires laws and rights that apply regardless of status or position. However, what is the scope of the qualification that a rule should apply to everyone 'under similar conditions'? Are conditions ever completely similar? Does this include knowledge, experience and capabilities? If it does, the rule applies differently to different people after all. If it does not, the rule will not always be just. There is always a need for interpretation and judgement according to unique conditions. Legal and moral laws are not laws of mathematics.

Were universal human rights applied to Colonel Gaddafi during the military intervention in Libya? Was it possible to do so? Surely, the aim of protecting the population was mixed with a thirst for retribution and political expediency. Could the intervention be justified only by raising it to the status of a general rule? Should it then also be applied to President Bashar Al-Assad of Syria? So far it has not been because the conditions there are different: there is scope for more collateral damage due to a denser population and more political risks due to the situation in the Middle East. Would the hesitation concerning Syria have been a good reason not to intervene in Libya?

Justice is never fully guaranteed. Judges have discretionary space. There could be the tribunal of a formal or informal community that judges deviations and allows for special pleading. While laws lay down minimal requirements for justice people have the discretion to go further than required, as Levinas also indicated. There may be principles that guide debate, but not universal rules (Neiman 2009, p. 214). If universality entails application of the same rule under the same conditions, and conditions are never the same, what then remains of universality? Rules then become principles to be interpreted and implemented according to conditions. A rule when applied yields a ruling, an end of judgement, while a principle, as the word says, yields a beginning, in this case a beginning of debate.

Universal rules become particularly problematic under the following conditions. First, how they play out and are to be weighed against each other depends on individuals and their circumstances. Second, as elaborated by Martha Nussbaum (1986), Aristotle leaves room for the tragedy that a good person may do a bad thing because conditions leave room only for a choice between two bads, as illustrated by classical Greek tragedies. Agamemnon had no other choice than that between his daughter to which he had paternal responsibilities and the army for which he was responsible as its commander. What use is the categorical imperative here?

Neiman (2009) does not believe (any more than I do) in an essentialist, closed definition of evil (or anything else), but one of the characterizations

of evil that she gives (p. 337) is a deliberate neglect or even denial of the principle that harm to innocent bystanders must be avoided, by which violence against people becomes as random or indiscriminate as natural disasters. She recognizes that suicide terrorists may be motivated by ideals and indicates that one can never know with certainty what people's motives are, so that people may never be judged as evil, but she condemns their actions as evil. But what if those fanatics have a different view of innocence and see the bystanders as also responsible for what they see as evil? I am not condoning their actions here but I am merely trying to be coherent in my attempt to understand them. I doubt that the given characterization of evil is adequate. The Holocaust was not random but fairly precisely targeted at, especially, Jews. In my view at least part of evil lies in dehumanization, no longer seeing people as human. I am sure Neiman agrees on this. Here, in contrast with Neiman, my fear of universality is that it tends to neglect individuality, to erase the individual, thus becoming part of evil. This gives another, perhaps better, account of evil from idealism, from religion or political ideology. Universalism can be used to fight evil but also to perpetrate it. Evil may also arise from cowardice, in following authority while knowing it to be evil, or from following role models that were thought or assumed to be good.

The Aristotelian virtue of realizing potential resonates in Nietzsche, which somewhat misleadingly he calls will to power, especially the realizing of the potential of human spirit, which also gives joy (hence the 'gay science'). With Levinas we find the virtue of empathy and altruism to be oriented towards the other.

It is impossible to be an adequate finite being in the face of an absolute being such as God. We can never live up to him. In Nietzsche's analysis of guilt (in his *Towards the Genealogy of Morality* 1988 [1887]), will to power in its external manifestation is blocked by rules of morality and then turns inwards against the self, tormenting it, and the perversity of that is that we see it as justified given our incapacity to fulfil our duty to God (Janaway 2007, p. 137).

If we now replace God by the other human being, as a source of self-transcendence, we have a better chance of behaving adequately. The advantage also is that this other can respond, be heard and understood. Dialogue replaces prayer. However, the other cannot be fully grasped and that is for the good. Some see it as liberating that in contrast with God the other can never fully grasp us. Because we cannot fully grasp the other he or she can continue to surprise us, and we can never have the pretension of having fully absorbed or appropriated the other. These insights I derive from Levinas, if I bend his hyperboles into ellipses a bit. This is, I think, what he means when he sees the other as 'infinite' or 'holy'. But we can, in contrast with what Nietzsche claims, understand the other to some extent, and often adequately, if we develop and exercise our empathy. There is always cognitive distance but it is not infinite.

With Nietzsche I want to avoid that benevolence or altruism become such a high demand that few can satisfy it, which suppresses the self and becomes an excuse for a lack of daring and enterprise and can burst outside in frustration and violence. Benevolence is not only, not even in the first place, a duty but an opportunity, and to that Nietzsche was blind.

Nietzsche was right that empathy is not perfect because we can never fully know the other, but that is no reason to leave the other aside, as he seems to think, but precisely a reason to orient oneself towards the other as a source of insight, ethically and cognitively, precisely because he or she is never completely known and therefore can always tell us something that we would not have thought up ourselves. Nietzsche nevertheless is right that empathy can never be complete, never turns into full identification. And where empathy reaches its limit we must extend the benefit of the doubt, we must resist the temptation to discard the unknown and to smear the stain of distrust, especially because we must resist the instinctive urge to distrust and reject others outside our own circle. I will return to this instinct later in Chapter 10.

In contrast to God, but as with others, we are imperfect. We have a right and a practical necessity, in contrast perhaps with Levinas, to be selective in our association with others. Yet, no matter how improbable it may seem that another has something to say to us, that possibility always exists. This yields a requirement for a fundamental respect and readiness to open oneself to any other human being. And there I may approach something deontological, something Kantian. This principle weighs heavily and is not easily shoved aside. However, even this is not absolute.

I go along with Levinas in the idea that if one were to take the self and current understanding as a point of departure one can no longer practise the openness needed to escape from existing meanings and identities. I also go along with Levinas in the idea that approach to the other can never be complete and there will always remain distance between self and other. One will never fully grasp the other. Acceptance of this impossibility is an ethical prerequisite. If it were possible then that would entail an end to the significance of the other, used up as it were if one merges with the other. This is reminiscent of Pascal's argument for the inscrutability of God (*deus absconditus*): we must know enough about him to follow him but if we knew all there is to know of him then there would no longer be a need to follow him. The other now replaces God, which must for the same reason not be fully comprehensible (*alter absconditus*). In that sense there is no merging, no mutual absorption of self and other. The potential of the other is never exhausted, the other is never done, and in that sense he or she is infinite, whereby our need for the other has no end. Also there is not an equilibrium, a balance, of giving and receiving, of reciprocity. The giving occurs without expectation, let alone a demand in advance that there will be reciprocity.

However, I do not go along with the lack of limit in the surrender to the other that Levinas indicates. For that I am still too much of a Nietzschean

(and Aristotelian). One has the duty to extend benefit of the doubt and to be open for each other; however, after one has done that – to the best of one's insight, to be tested on the insight of others – if one cannot accept what the other demands or gives, one may say 'no'. Responsibility remains one's own. One may not reject people but one may choose one's partners. There lies a Nietzschean consideration of the protection of creative potential, the realization of life force and a striving for self-transcendence. One need not, indeed may not, let oneself be shamed by 'decency' in order to surrender or discount it. Even more strongly, the right, yes even perhaps the duty, to say no to the other, at times, follows, in my view, from Levinas's own argument. If the other forms a source of self-transcendence for me, in his opposition to me and his appeal to me, which I cannot ignore, then I am also, vice versa, a source of transcendence for the other, if I truly take his or her interest into account, and that requires that I also owe him or her my opposition, my no. Look at friends who can, and often should, 'tell each other the truth' because they are friends.

### Difference

*Vive la difference:*<sup>3</sup> we must break down and connect universals on the basis of individuals and move to and fro between the general and the specific. While life is lived and meaning is created in the differentiation of specific individuals, the abstract concept or idea, the equalizer, threatens to move it aside or to dominate it. I suspect that here in the deep the misplaced metaphor of meaning as an object, or as a container with content, is in our way. What should be provisional, as a temporary point of crystallization, becomes a crystal palace of dominance, regimented by theory, formalization, planning, programming and rule giving.

Nietzsche provides similar arguments (in *On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense*) for the sake of difference and against universals as the equalizers that destroy life. Dionysus – the Greek god of wine, drunkenness, orgy, the force of nature with roots in the earth, and ecstasy, the patron of agriculture and the theatre, the principle of the liberation of the self – was used in Nietzsche's early work (*The Birth of Tragedy*) as a symbol of unfettered aesthetic force and inebriation, in contrast to and in combination with Apollo as the symbol of beauty of form, harmony and balance. In his later work Dionysus appeared again in Nietzsche's work, but now more as a symbol of difference (Tongeren and Schank 1990, p. 160), ongoing destruction and rebirth, creative destruction and self-transcendence, guidance in life – as a reconfirmation of life as indestructible, powerful and joyful (Kaufmann 1968, p. 410).

How to proceed? How does the dismantling and reconfiguration of universals work? Categories are steps that we stand on only in order to step away. They should not be used as fixed rules but as principles that must find their application as steps on a road that can change direction. Wittgenstein spoke of a ladder that one throws away after having climbed up on it. In

Chapter 5 I proposed a cycle of discovery and in Chapter 6 I applied it to the process of meaning change. There, abstraction is needed to break out of specific contexts to novel ones where the abstraction is embedded in the new context and is expanded into novel local connotations, which can lead to the breakdown of existing abstractions and to the composition of novel ones. This also offers an opposition to such radical defence of difference that universals are rejected unconditionally. Universals are needed not only for generalization as a basis for logical argument and causal explanation, but also as a bridge to novel contexts in a process of discovery and change of meaning. This applies also to moral principles. Such a principle reflects past experience and is the starting point when entering new conditions, but it is a beginning only, though one which may lead to its change.

Often there are no necessary and sufficient conditions for something to belong to a category. In our urge towards logical order without residue we are used to seeing it as a shortcoming, in our quest for essence and a hidden core. In fact it is a blessing because it leaves room for difference, deviance and a shift of insight and meaning.

But how do we cope with such incomplete determinacy of meaning? We employ prototypes that lead to categorization on the basis of resemblance (as Aristotle had already proposed); but the deviance that is tolerated depends on the context. Here I follow the pragmatism of meaning from Wittgenstein, where meaning is employed as a tool: something is tolerated if it works in a specific context. Earlier I employed the metaphor of a screwdriver that is used as a hammer: it is irregular but if it works it is OK.

Another opening for difference follows from the Aristotelian notion of 'exemplary cause'. This is the original meaning of the term 'paradigm'. It is, for example, a role model that is imitated or mimicked. Mimicking leaves room for variety and difference, on the basis of different interpretations of the role model, depending on the context. If for example as a worker in a firm one imitates the entrepreneur at the head of the firm, then that requires imagination of what he would do in a given situation, and that requires one's own insight and experience and judgement of the situation. While imitation may denote a strict reproduction of steps of activity (as in a script), mimicry leaves room for improvisation, variation, shortcuts and work-arounds, which aim at the same goal but in a different way.<sup>4</sup> This connects with the cycle of discovery. My appreciation of the room for interpretation that a role model yields is connected with my acceptance of principles coupled with a wariness of strict universal rules.

The notion of exemplary cause is also relevant for the discussion on morality. Kant distinguished between knowledge about the world and morality as a form of judgement without knowledge. What, then, is the basis for moral judgement? Neiman (2009) indicated that it is foremost a matter of reflection from moral 'heroes': clear examples that almost everyone will recognize. A hero is a paragon, a leading example of virtues one cherishes.

Differences within a group are bounded by moral codes, rules and some degree of enforcement. But sometimes there are different ways to satisfy norms; deviant conduct may be accepted when successful, but when not successful may lead to exit from the group. To fulfil functions, within a group such as an organization, people play roles. I define the fulfilment of a function as the fulfilment of conditions attached to a step (or more steps) in the node in a script, and those conditions determine the *role* in that script. One approach in the determination of a role is to try to impose full, canonical rules that fix the role under all possible conditions. This is a recipe for failure because the needed differentiation across different contexts is open-ended and cannot be fully predicted. This is demonstrated by the fact that the strict application of rules, in 'work to rule', is a form of sabotage. Often the rule is more of a guideline, in the form of exemplary performance that is to be mimicked in discretionary interpretation, depending on conditions.

As argued, among others by Simmel (1950), while primary socialization takes place in the family, secondary socialization takes place in organizations where people convene for work, sports, recreation, etc. In economically less-developed societies, with a limited infrastructure of all kinds (roads, schools, safety, laws and equality under the law, a reliable currency, etc.) and hence little trade and division of labour, people are often locked up in more or less autarkic clans or families. The majority if not the whole of the life world is enfolded there. Secondary socialization hardly takes place. As a result there is little diversity within the group and little contact between groups so that intergroup diversity can hardly be utilized. To the extent that an institutional basis for trust is lacking, in the form of laws and a reliable execution of them and widely shared norms and habits, one will have to build trust in personal relations or fall back on family or clan. Within groups social control is strong and there is little room for egotism. In currently well-developed countries that also was the case some time ago and few people would want to return to it.

In complex, modern societies people have many roles to play in family, work, profession, sport, recreation, art, etc. They have many places of secondary socialization. They develop a 'persona' that does not coincide with any single role and goes beyond roles in individual mental structures they have made along their life paths. People are more than the work they do. They bring into their role fulfilment idiosyncrasies adopted in other roles. This is a source of both error and innovation, yet a striking, deviant but successful role fulfilment can lead to a new role model. The complexity of roles makes it impossible to build personal trust everywhere: one needs laws and wider customs and norms, and many relationships will hardly be personal anymore. The self has a wider action space and there is more room for egotism.

In Chapter 5 I indicated that cognitive distance between people arises because they construct different cognitive frames on the basis of different experiences along their life paths and how that raises the problem of limited

mutual understanding, but also an opportunity to learn. The capability to deal with people who think differently is not fixed but can be developed by an increase of knowledge (absorptive capacity) and of the ability to make oneself understood by people who think differently, and of experience in collaboration with them. This yields the ability to cross a larger cognitive distance and that yields more innovation. This has been confirmed in scientific research (Nooteboom et al. 2007). In innovation those have an advantage who have developed the ability to collaborate with people who think differently. This is of great importance, because if orientation towards the different other were not economically viable its overall viability would be much in doubt.

I also indicated that the cycle of discovery yields a further explanation of how dialogue at some cognitive distance helps to transform our knowledge and meanings. In dialogue we must shift what we know or think into the novel context of what the other knows or thinks (in what in the cycle is called 'generalization'). The other must try to assimilate what we say or do into his or her cognitive apparatus. We can help with clever metaphors in which we try to put what we know in terms that are more familiar to the other. When in spite of such efforts mutual understanding is not achieved we can try it more indirectly by relating what we say to other knowledge we have, about other ways to approach the issue at hand ('differentiation', in terms of the cycle). When that also does not work, and we listen well, we may see where the thinking of the other works better, has more success, than that of our own and look for elements to which it may be ascribed with help from the other and try to fit those elements into our own thinking and practice ('reciprocation', in terms of the cycle) by experiments with hybrids. This requires what Levinas called 'passivity', the capability to bracket oneself and one's ideas and to be open to other thought.

### Trust

With Schopenhauer, and many others including David Hume, I share the view that human beings have two often opposing instincts, one for survival and one for solidarity (altruism) or compassion; and when push comes to shove survival mostly wins, though not always. The evolutionary arguments for this will be given in the last chapter. Under pressure people will often drop benevolence in favour of survival. Nevertheless, though the instinct for benevolence will often be the weakest we do have it, and we can develop and strengthen it by cultural means.

Principles are fine, but how are they practised? In Chapter 8 I discussed the criticism of Levinas's neglect to elaborate his ideas in the practice of society, justice, law, politics and economics. Let us not only philosophize in abstraction from action and experience but also apply the abstractions in practical contexts of action. This is needed not only for practical usefulness

but also for the testing of adequacy. Let me, in other words, practise what I preach. I now try to make the arguments for otherhumanism more concrete in their application. What are the pragmatics of knowledge, language and ethics in relations between people?

How does horizontal transcendence work? Can it be reconciled with economic behaviour? I indicated that the ability to 'cross cognitive distance' yields economic advantage. How does collaboration between people in openness and mutual influence work?

Trust is the proper place to show how important for practical life a philosophy of the other is. The motive for this book arose in part from earlier work on trust, looking for the philosophical background of trust and the sources of altruism and egotism. For the practice of the relation between self, other and third parties, also in the economy, trust is indispensable. It requires give and take, openness and empathy. I argue that it also requires and implements horizontal transcendence. Trust is a rich and slippery notion that requires elucidation (see Nooteboom 2002). Here, the discussion becomes more technical, in part, tapping socio-economic research.

To start with, several misunderstandings need to be eliminated. First, there is the distinction between the subject of trust ('trustor') and the object ('trustee'). Second, trust entails a paradox of information. On the one hand it is based on some information, from experience or reputation, but on the other hand it entails the presence of uncertainty or risk. If one were certain about the future behaviour of others one would no longer speak of trust. If trust increases, this does not entail more certainty but more acceptance of uncertainty (as Luhmann (1988) indicated). Because there always is uncertainty, trust is always to some degree a leap of faith.

Third, there is a distinction between trusting behaviour and trust as an inclination or disposition to such behaviour. That disposition can be psychological (for people), but also organizational (for organizations). An organization can have a disposition to trusting behaviour on the basis of its internal structure, procedures and culture that is enacted and reconstructed or shifted by members of the organization. Thus both people and organizations can be both trustors and trustees.

Fourth, one should make a distinction between trust in competence (i.e. 'technical' ability to honour commitments) and in intention (i.e. the will and commitment to do something to the best of one's competence). The latter includes benevolence, the lack of opportunism, and attention and dedication (commitment).

Fifth, trust can be based on rational evaluation, in a reasoned judgement of the reliability of someone and of the acceptance of risk, but it is also based on intuition, emotions, routine or lack of attention to risks.

Sixth, there is a distinction between control and trust, though often there is a combination of the two. To avoid confusion and misunderstanding it is useful to employ the wider notion of reliance that includes control, and

trust that goes beyond control. One can rely on someone because he or she is contractually bound, for example, but trust requires compliance in the absence of control. Control can take the form of a limitation of freedom, the action space of the trustee, on the basis of contractual or hierarchical enforcement. It can also take the form of incentives of punishment or reward, reputation, dependence, loss of so-called 'specific investment' in the relationship (an investment that loses value when the relationship breaks), or fear of uncertainty. In other words, control entails power. Beyond control lies trust on the basis of moral rules or virtues, reciprocity, personal ties in empathy or identification, or routinization. There one relies on someone even if he or she has both the opportunity and a material interest for breaking trust. Here, in the duality of trust and control, one sees how economics and the 'life world' inevitably intersect.

Seventh, trustworthiness is limited because of possible 'golden opportunities' of disloyalty, or pressure of survival, or conflict between different loyalties. Control and trust are conditioned or affected by institutions, of laws or their execution, reputation mechanisms, ethics and forms of intermediation or arbitration. In short, trust is a predicate with four aspects: a trustor (1) trusts a trustee (2) in some respect (3) (competence or intentions) and under some conditions (4).

Trust is not a matter of being nice to each other. Precisely because we trust each other we can afford hefty differences of opinion. And when conflicts are resolved this deepens trust. Of course, that need not be the case and trust can collapse. That depends on our commitment and our skill in the art of trust. Empathy and a philosophy oriented towards the other are crucial.

Trust not distrust should be the default. One should trust until there is evidence of untrustworthiness. A supposition of trustworthiness can be refuted by experience. A supposition of untrustworthiness withholds us from relationships that can demonstrate trustworthiness. A proof in advance that one is trustworthy is as impossible as proving a theory. As Karl Popper, among others, argued, a theory can be refuted but not proven by experience. If a theory cannot be falsified it is unscientific. Since trustworthiness can be disproved but not proven one could according to that maxim say that trust is scientific and distrust is not. Attempts to prove trustworthiness lead to lies that hide everything that may be seen as evidence of untrustworthiness. And everything that goes wrong can be interpreted as evidence of untrustworthiness.

Trust suffers from *causal ambiguity*. When expectations are not fulfilled, there can be several causes. Some mishap occurred that no one could have foreseen or prevented, or there was a shortfall of competence, or someone did not pay attention, or someone cheated. One generally does not know what the cause was. An opportunist, especially, will claim a mishap.

When something goes wrong on our side it is best to admit it instantly, because if we don't the other is likely to conclude the worst and judge that

it was deliberate, if the error comes to light. If someone did not cheat, why did he or she not report the problem in time so as both to prevent it and to mitigate its effects? We should therefore resist the temptation to hide our failures and shortcomings. We feel that this weakens our bargaining position, but that is erroneous thinking. Lack of openness damages reputation and trust and the damage is difficult to repair once it has been done.

When something goes wrong on the side of the partner one should give him or her the benefit of the doubt, asking for the cause or reason of shortcomings, not jumping to the conclusion that the other has cheated. This discussion is connected with the earlier discussion of rule and principle. Hirschman (1970) made the distinction between 'voice' and 'exit'. In exit, when one is dissatisfied one breaks the relationship; in voice one reports dissatisfaction and enters into debate to trace and mend its causes. Application of a moral rule or a contract with implementation of sanctions is exit. With a principle one embarks on voice.

Good negotiation is not surrendering as little as possible, in profit or information, but finding out what problems weigh heavily for the other that one can solve at limited cost to oneself. Openness is needed if only because without it the other cannot know what he or she can do for you. Many potentially fruitful relationships fail from unexpressed fears or distrust that are thus withheld from the other who therefore gets no opportunity to help relieve or eliminate them. Openness should go together with empathy, the ability to understand how the other thinks and feels in his or her situation. This is not the same as identification, where one thinks and feels alike. That would go too far, if it were feasible. For trust, *voice* should be the default, the thing to set out with, and *exit* is reverted to only when dedication to *voice* fails.

### Social psychology

Typically in trust there is a combination or alternation of reasoning and feeling, and on this social psychology has much to say in terms of 'mental frames' and switching between them, of interpretation of the behaviour of others ('relational signalling') and of the heuristics of decision-making. Here we should take into account that much of our mental activity is unconscious, routinized and left to 'subsidiary awareness' (Polanyi 1966), as when we think of other things while driving a car.

Social psychology yields insight into the heuristics of decision-making that people use. In a survey Bazerman (1998) mentions the following:

- *Availability*: people judge the probable cause of an event depending on what aspects of it are readily 'available' to the mind, i.e. are laden with emotion, are appealing, are recent or are recognizable. Lesser available features and events are neglected.

- *Representativeness*: the probability of an event is judged by its similarity to stereotypes of that kind of event. We recognize something according to its similarity to salient features of a prototype, which can be a stereotype, and on that basis we attribute other features of the prototype that in fact are not present. This easily leads to prejudice. One overestimates probability on the basis of a number of occurrences that are too small for statistical validity.
- *Anchoring and adjustment*: judgement is based on some starting value or standard ('anchor') from earlier experience or social comparison, plus an incremental adjustment of that value. It has been shown that people stay close to even arbitrary anchors that have nothing to do with what is going on. First impressions can form anchors that affect the relationship and trust for a long time.
- *Escalation of commitment*: according to the rational precept that 'bygones are bygones' one should not look at sacrifices made in the past but only at the profit and loss of continued involvement. In fact, however, people maintain loss-generating commitments because otherwise past sacrifices 'would have been in vain'. Thus we arrive at the argument that armed forces should stay in Afghanistan because otherwise the sacrifice of the life of soldiers would have been in vain. This is related with the wider principle of 'cognitive dissonance': the cutting of losses and an exit would imply a confession that in the past one had made a wrong decision to enter. Thus the issue does not concern the merits of staying but the prevention of a loss of face. It is easier to pull out if someone other than the one who decided to move in makes the decision. To pull out of Afghanistan a new government would be needed.

These heuristics are often not rational: they lead to impulsiveness, mistaken assessment and prejudice. Yet they can be 'adaptive' in the sense that they contribute to survival and success under conditions of uncertainty, the necessity of a quick judgement and a limited capacity for rational assessment. Such conditions can occur in the present, but our thinking is also affected by dispositions that have developed under conditions of earlier, long lasting periods of evolution during the times of our ancestors, while under current conditions they may be a disadvantage. This is the line of thought from evolutionary psychology.

Concerning the heuristic of availability, note that an emotionally charged observation of a crisis situation that jars us from routinized behaviour and catapults our thinking from subsidiary to focal awareness is useful for preventing accidents from being undetected in such routinized behaviour. Without this type of behaviour our cognition would suffer from overload, but an emotionally charged perception of a crisis is needed to wake us from routine.

The heuristic of representativeness is connected with the role of prototypes in language and categorization. We are inclined to see things as

being similar to the familiar, and not to see them if such a comparison does not obtain. This leads to blindness for the new but also to a fast identification and enactment of the known, such as a fast escape from the sabre-toothed tiger.

The heuristic of anchoring and adjustment can lead to too slow adjustment; but fast adjustment is not always good. Studies of learning and adjustment show how hasty and large deviations from established practice can yield chaotic behaviour (Lounamaa and March 1987). The heuristic of escalation of commitment can also be useful, e.g. as a feature of the successful entrepreneur who persists against all setbacks. The relevance of heuristics for trust is clear. They affect the expectation and attribution of trustworthiness, on the basis of an emotional appeal, recent experience, stereotypes and existing norms.

Another psychological phenomenon is that sometimes people find it difficult to choose between immediate gratification and long-term well being, as in addiction or problems of 'weakness of the will'. An account for this has been offered on the basis of multiple selves that are in conflict with each other, or as a visceral drive versus rational assessment, or on the basis of 'availability': immediate gratification is more 'available'. Another possible explanation lies in a time effect: one thinks one can resist temptation as long as it does not arise, but then one falls for it when it is near. The relevance of this for relationships is also clear in the battle between loyalty to the other that is important in the long term and the short-term advantage that can be obtained at the expense of the other. Here also one cannot say that this is always harmful. As noted by Bazerman (1998) the impulse of temptation with neglect of the longer term can yield the vision of the entrepreneur who makes a gamble and grasps an opportunity.

The selection and operation of heuristics in decision-making depends on mental frames. People operate on the basis of chunks of mental modules that form perceptions and interpretations and guide behaviour in the use of heuristics. Relevant to trust are two basic frames: one oriented towards 'defending one's resources' and one directed towards 'solidarity' (Lindenberg 2003). In the first the basic stance is one of distrust and fear of loss, in which the actions of the other are seen as possible evidence of untrustworthiness – one is poised for preventive action or revenge. In the second one the basic stance is one of trust and being inclined to see the actions of the other as trustworthy. The claim that we have these two basic frames is in line with the idea, discussed elsewhere, that we have inborn, instinctive dispositions to both trust/loyalty and distrust/cheating, based on both a striving for survival (*conatus*) and a disposition towards being a loyal member of a group, and to accept sacrifices for it.

The frame which one is in depends on character, experience and conditions. If one has little self-confidence and feels threatened one is inclined to distrust. One feels more threatened when under pressure of competition

or adverse economic conditions. In the present financial crisis we can expect explosions of distrust. In the trust frame one can tolerate more criticism than in the frame of distrust. That is why trust is not being nice to each other. Precisely because one has trust one can have a hefty disagreement. Thus one advantage of trust is that it gives more room for learning from criticism.

Of crucial importance for trust is empathy or identification: the ability to put oneself into or identify oneself with the insight, ideas and feelings of the other. This is clearly associated with the heuristic of 'availability' that increases according to whether one can empathize or identify. This affects one's own trustworthiness (in the willingness to make sacrifices for others) and one's own trusting (in tolerance for behaviour that deviates from expectations). One will sooner help someone when one can identify with his or her motives or reasons. One may be able to adopt blame. One may see the other's reaction as a justified response to one's own.

Another reason to ascribe blame to oneself while in fact it lies with the other is to avoid uncertainty and to achieve a (misplaced) feeling of being in control. If one has the feeling that it is impossible or very difficult to affect someone's behaviour one may ascribe blame to oneself to avoid a feeling of powerlessness by being subject to suppressive or arbitrary conduct. This explains the otherwise incomprehensible phenomenon that against all evidence of Stalinist terror citizens maintained their trust in 'father Stalin'. Facing the truth was unbearable. For people with low self-confidence or low self-esteem trust in the untrustworthy may be a measure of despair or it can give a confirmation of low self-esteem. Also, for people with much rather than little self-confidence the acceptance of a fault as one's own can give a sense of control because one feels one can easily deal with it, which may be an illusion of overconfidence.

These mechanisms can obstruct the making and maintaining of relationships due to prejudice, impulsiveness or miscalculation. They can also stabilize relationships by anchoring and adjustment and escalation of commitment.

What I have wanted to show in this discussion of trust is how important empathy, the ability to be open to the other and to put oneself into another's shoes, is to build and maintain trust as well as to deal with its risks, with insight into someone's weaknesses and conditions in which he or she has to break the trust. This demonstrates the relevance of a philosophy of the other in daily affairs.

### **Third parties**

We should look further than the relationship between self and other, recognizing third and more parties. Go-betweens or third parties can perform valuable services in a variety of roles for building, maintaining or

repairing trust.<sup>5</sup> Levinas recognized this but did not elaborate on it very much, and his analysis is mainly negative. According to him the entry of a third person upsets the ideal relation to the single other, with its purity of unconditional concern and sacrifice. Now one has to make an impossible comparison between incomparable, unique others to take into account the interests of the third person and the effects of what the other is doing to that third. Here I offer a more positive account of how a third party can mediate to improve a relationship with the other, as a broker in cognition and trust. Here again there is both a cognitive and an ethical side.

Earlier I indicated that one has the right to one's own choice of partners but that it is wise to test it against insights from third parties. To the extent that people are more locked into a single relationship after a while cognitive distance between self and other will decline: they have less novelty to offer each other. However, as Levinas said, cognitive distance will never decrease to zero. It can even increase. People never become identical and can continue to surprise each other. However, the potential for diversity remains larger when both parties also have contact with different other parties. Thereby knowledge of partners is continually refreshed, which feeds the relationship.

The sociologist Simmel (1950) showed the extent of changes that occur in the transition from two (a dyad) to three agents (a triad). If in a triad one loses a partner there is still one left. In that way risks of loss are spread. Two can form a coalition against the third, for good or for bad. It can help to curtail an opportunist, but it can also lock someone up and keep him or her from exiting into better environments. A third party can act as a go-between for the others but can also play them off against each other. The latter yields the notion of the 'laughing third' (*tertius gaudens*). Go-betweens can help to build trust, bridge cognitive distance, prevent or eliminate misunderstanding, and mediate in conflict.

In organizations people assimilate, build and maintain shared (but never identical) perspectives, values and norms. This yields the notion of an organization as a 'sense making system' (Weick 1979), a 'system of shared meanings' (Smircich 1983), an 'interpretation system' (Choo 1998) or a 'focusing device' (Nooteboom 2009). For the sake of an efficient utilization of competencies and other resources, without the need for discussion at every step or turn about directions, goals, visions, interpretations and ways to solve conflicts, organizational focus gives a sense of a shared purpose or 'mission', priorities, agendas, visions of the organization and its environment, ways of dealing with each other, and role models. Benevolence or rivalry can both be part of that focus. The danger of focus is that it creates myopia and group think that makes the organization blind to some opportunities and threats in the environment. To repair that organizations need external partners to complement imperfect cognition. Thus organizational entities also require others at a sufficient cognitive distance.<sup>6</sup>

What I have wanted to show is that what runs through everything is the importance of openness to the other: the capability to understand the other, to make oneself understood by the other, to put oneself into the thinking and feeling of the other, however imperfect that will always be. That openness to the other, spiritually, socially and economically, is the cork on which otherhumanism floats, in its philosophy as well as in its economy. The mentality of otherhumanism is needed in the 'network economy'.

# 10

## How Viable Is It?

Do arguments for otherhumanism stand up to the reality of often instinctive, unreasoned, unconscious fears, egotism, narcissism, urge and pressure for survival, prejudice, ignorance, weakness, misunderstanding and unintended outcomes of conduct in interaction in a complex society, including the horrors perpetrated by human beings against each other across the world? Isn't otherhumanism a naive, utopian ideal, a pie in the sky? But when is a view on humanity realistic? Only when it recognizes human weakness and the perverse effects of society? Or when it recognizes human potential and opportunities for culture? The point is not that humanity is on a course towards benevolence but that it has some potential for it that we can develop in culture.

The most pessimistic among philosophers is Schopenhauer. According to him the human being is driven by a blind, insatiable will to satisfy urges. This makes people self-centred and unreliable. Furthermore, the character of people is fixed and their betterment is an illusion. Hence any forgiveness is unwise: once people have shown themselves to be unreliable, one can be sure they will remain so. One should avoid dependence on others. One should treat others as if they were objects: inert and unalterable, or at best as children, not spoiling them with friendliness and benevolence. It is best to cultivate solitude. It is better not to be open to others and to stay aloof. It is better to distrust than to trust. If all this applied, the prospect for my views would be dim indeed. But while I go along with Schopenhauer some way on some points, on most points I have argued the opposite in this book. My argument is that the self needs the other to escape its delusions of self. A full life entails acceptance of risks, which also entails novel opportunities. One can learn from setbacks. Next to self-interest people are also driven by altruism. It is better to start with trust and grant the benefit of the doubt to people and learn from disappointments than forego its opportunities. Life as proposed by Schopenhauer is miserable, bleak, autistic, arrogant and delusional.

In Chapter 9 I have already taken into account economic conditions. Willy-nilly, economic viability probably forms a necessary though not sufficient

condition for viability more widely. However, our idea of economic viability may change. I have shown that the capability to collaborate with people who think differently yields economic advantage in an enhanced capability to innovate. To employ a fashionable slogan: it is needed for 'open innovation'. Doing everything by yourself is counter-productive.

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of otherhumanism is that so far my analysis fails to yield drama and ritual, which people need in order to celebrate and enact togetherness in otherness for solace and transcendence. The first question for this chapter therefore is whether otherhumanism offers sufficient perspective for this. How might it appeal to emotions and feelings? Can social intercourse substitute for prayer?

A second question is whether otherhumanism may not lead to the disappearance of difference, a lack of idiosyncrasy or, on the contrary, to fragmentation and relativism. Does it lead to people taking each other into account to the extent that no deviant view and own will or conviction remains? Will it, after all, be to the detriment of the flourishing of life?

A third question is how it would then work. That is largely the question of how trust works (and that I have discussed already in Chapter 9). But how resilient and viable is trust?

### Appeal

For a broad and emotional appeal otherhumanism requires drama that can match that of Christ, Mohammed and Buddha. Here there is a lesson from the development of Buddhism. There was a time when Buddhism was cerebral, abstract and sparse, a preoccupation for a spiritual elite, which provided insufficient appeal to gather a wide field of followers – the gap had to be filled with symbolism and ritual. It is not easy to compete with the drama of the Son of God who was persecuted, betrayed, executed and then resurrected to carry the burden of human sins and open the gate to heaven. Can we think of something adequate to that power and appeal? Are there prophets and martyrs of otherhumanism? Levinas perhaps? Few people will be carried along by the abstract arguments of the preceding chapters. What can substitute for Catholic liturgy and its ritual with resplendent robes in splendid churches? I shudder at Christian fundamentalism in the US, but when I watch the television channel that broadcasts the singing togetherness of their communities, I am impressed, not necessarily favourably, shuddering at the surrender and emotion with which they sing. Such exaltation does not have to go along with Catholic splendour. Franciscans, Cathars and the Reformation show that humans can be attracted to the simple, sober and intimate that we also feel in small Romanesque churches and chapels that go back to when the Catholic faith had not yet been lost in grandeur. Can otherhumanism offer something similar, such as communities where people tell one another of the good life and exemplify, share and celebrate it?

Consider how much human drama we have outside godservice in the history of literature, film, theatre and popular culture. Could these not offer an experience and celebration of otherhumanism? For example, the old epics, Greek tragedies, Shakespeare, romantic literature, the romantic literature of the age of sensibility, operas, and so on. Now one could say that much of literature shows how people exercise their egotism and their Nietzschean will to power rather than benevolence, and indeed literature should do this, if it is to reflect life. But if there is any truth in my earlier arguments, then true literature will also show the perversities and tragic demise of egotism, the tragedy of heroism and the 'fragility of goodness' as Martha Nussbaum called it. Even literature that opens up to the depravity of humanity – as in the work of Dostoyevsky, de Sade, Baudelaire, Genet, Céline – feeds our feeling for otherhumanism. Egotism is tragic and destroys itself because commitment to empathy for the other is needed for the highest form of freedom, spiritual growth, learning and even success in the economy. Literature is the activity par excellence in which universals are thrust into the sobering stream of reality and fragment and dissolve in the rich specificity of individual people in specific circumstances. Thus, by falling apart in literature, universals are called to life and reconstitute themselves. Literature can be a celebration, a demonstration and an exercise of humanism.

Literature offers the opportunity for virtual experiments in ethics and morality by stepping into the shoes of the protagonists in the novel through their actions that in real life would be too risky, would carry shame and blame, or would be impossible due to the lack of opportunity or means. In Chapter 4 I discussed the role of conscious thought and language that feeds the unconscious with mental simulations of possible actions prior to their initiation, on the basis of our or others' prior experience with similar situations. It is difficult to draw adequate lessons from one's own life, because one selectively forgets what one did in the past and what the conditions were: one reconstructs what one did more positively, more flatteringly, than it was (Ricoeur 1990). And as indicated in Chapter 6 there cannot be a private language. Dreams may be honest, revealing our secret vices, but memory is not. The novel (or opera, or play) tempts us to suspend disbelief and moral judgement, giving us room to contemplate conduct that otherwise would not be admitted to consciousness. As Reckwitz (2009, p. 167) said, literature 'can make us aware ... of the irreducible particularity of the world and the people living in it, thereby teaching us to respect their alterity or otherness that is no longer perceived as an extension of our own self-image'. A play is an exercise in empathy; music is an exercise in attunement. In the terminology of Levinas, drama shows the 'visage' of the other, lifting the self above itself.

Poetry ventures beyond the actual and tinkers with the boundaries of the thinkable. It shifts perspectives, and in doing so can, among other things, help to cross cognitive (including cultural) distance between people.

Metaphors are an instrument for triggering understanding of the unknown, and it is no coincidence that poetry employs metaphor a great deal, though it is more than that as it triggers resonance between people.

Novels, plays and films can parade the lusts of violence, discrimination, egoism and narcissism, but in the unfolding of drama they can also offer a release or cleansing (*catharsis*) from the anguish of death and the contingencies of life.

What is the role of art more widely? Does art yield rest or movement, harmony or disharmony? Is ecstasy rest or excitement? According to Schopenhauer art offers an escape from the contingency and vicissitudes of life and death in a serene contemplation of unmoving, Platonic, eternal ideas. It offers a momentary escape from the will in a surrender of the self: art as arrested eternity. For Nietzsche art is, at least in part, next to Apollonian harmony, a Dionysian exuberance in an intensification of the will and a confirmation of the self. Can it be both? What if the crux, and what they have in common, is transcendence and ecstasy, which can be both settling and unsettling? One can have the feeling that everything settles into place, as well as a feeling that a breakthrough is made to a new horizon. If indeed transcendence is the crux, art in several ways is a delivery from the self, and in that it may facilitate otherhumanism.

But can the other human being, inside or outside of literature, really replace God as a source of transcendence? Can it satisfy us in our thirst for the absolute, the indestructible, to escape from our puny, trivial, suffering and vulnerable existence? Can a conversation replace prayer? Can the other help us to accept the tragedies of unjust suffering, accident and disaster? Not if we can only find solace in a fabled life after death. Not if we expect miracles or an answer to our prayers from a non-existent God. For many, such a surrender of God is an unacceptable loss.

Yet the concrete other and the notion of otherness can provide solace in living through the pain of life and help us to rise above it; and we can receive solace by giving it. In this there is more spiritual nobility than in moving our burdens off onto the shoulders of a redeemer. We can have awe not just for a god but also for the other human being and for the miracle that in spite of everything it is capable of benevolence. Benevolence is not entirely against our nature and we have a fighting chance to develop and sustain it. The crux lies in the acceptance of death, and surrender to it, perhaps even the celebration of it, without help from God or a hereafter. Patricia de Martelaere (1993) suggested that in art we can defeat death's determining when our lives will end by determining our own end through the pursuit and achievement of the sublime: art as self-determination. But the crux is to accept that death tells us where the end is. The longing for ultimate completion and completeness is inherently egotistic and lies beyond the reach of the human being. It yields a never-ending shift of the horizon of want that maintains unhappiness, as Schopenhauer said. But is the only

answer a Buddhist surrender, an effacement of the self, as Schopenhauer also claimed?

Again I look to evolution for inspiration. Our challenge is to realize our potential as best we can and then pass on that potential and our accomplishments to those who follow us. We should derive satisfaction in what we can do and in what we leave behind. The idea that death should inspire us to live was also an idea of Heidegger. Hannah Arendt objected that we should equally be inspired by birth. Let us look forward to the birth of those who come after us and the new potential that yields. Such conduct can be dedication to children, the environment and society. Having done what we honestly could we can welcome the tranquillity of death. If God did exist, perhaps this is what he would have wanted.

For Nietzsche, as for most people, there is also the problem of the apparently senselessness and arbitrariness of human suffering. According to Nietzsche one of the ways out, through Christianity, was the self-imposition of guilt that justifies suffering as punishment, which is sought in asceticism. We are guilty therefore we suffer. Suffering is justified because of our inadequacy in the face of the absolute. But asceticism as penance for guilt and inadequacy goes against life. Another option, that of the Stoics, is to accept the senselessness of life and minimize one's vulnerability. But this entails the dodging of life.

Nietzsche sought another way, where suffering is part of self-transcendence: as a noble, impressive, meaningful and engaging Dionysian thrust of life. This inspiring crux of his thought is the joy and exuberance of life, not as pleasure, and certainly not as the absence of pain, but as an overflowing of the will, which to my mind is not a will to power but a will to self-realization. However, in this one cannot succeed by oneself: one needs others for it.

Is otherhumanism elitist? During the French Revolution Robespierre saw atheism as aristocratic, and hence atheists as worthy of capital punishment, along with earthly aristocrats. Is there truth in this? Is irreligious acceptance of death a privilege for the singularly well educated or the singularly brave? But why should upbringing be an advantage here? Might not a simple-minded sense of humanity be just as good? Montaigne said that to philosophize is to prepare for death. But could not other forms of the good life be as good or better at it?

How desirable is the striving for the sublime and absolute, the super-natural and superhuman? Precisely these qualities have led, in religious and political ideologies, to hypocrisy, dodging responsibility, false shame, misuse of ecclesiastical or bureaucratic power, ideological blindness, fanaticism, suppression of the individual and denial of life – as Nietzsche forcefully argued. And, as I have said, the other human being can be an object of awe and a source of transcendence. Literature testifies to this. The sublime rests in human life, precisely in the tragedy and finitude of it, and the striving to make the best of it.

I do not deny the logical possibility of a God but, by definition, if God is to be God, he cannot in our life be seen, heard or understood. For life we will have to make do with the other human being as his substitute. It shows mere pride to claim that one is the recipient of revelation from a God who is inscrutable: that we as the 'elect' do know of him and how best to follow him.

In short, why pursue the chimera of a God who does not answer and whom we cannot know other than by an appeal to privileged revelation that leaves no room for doubt or debate, while we have the living human being, concrete and tangible, who can respond, can be an inexhaustible source of inspiration, compassion and transcendence in his or her appeal to us and opposition to us, and can yield a hereafter in what we offer to following generations?

### Power

How about power? Doesn't my agreement with Nietzsche's thirst for the flourishing of life entail acceptance of his will to power? Earlier, I argued extensively that subjugation and dominance of others is self-defeating since it locks the self up in itself and robs it of its potential for cognitive and spiritual growth. But there is more.

What is power? Here, one can turn to Michel Foucault (1988). Let us adopt a customary definition of power as the ability to affect the conduct of others, in particular by affecting the room and direction of choice. This power can be constraining but also enabling by offering people new insights, options and means. Power becomes negative when it robs freedom by imposing a lockout or lock-in. A monopoly locks out competition and thereby locks in consumers. I grant that mostly power has a negative connotation, but for the negative side I prefer to use the term 'coercive power' and the positive side may be called 'enabling power'.

Take, for example, Montesquieu's separation of the three political powers of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. They impose restrictions and enable democracy. Because they limit each other they reduce the danger of negative power. Often evil is wrought in the full conviction of doing good. A new idea is often presented as a perspective and next hardens into an ideology or even a historical necessity, as happened in communism.

Does a teacher have power over a pupil? Certainly, and that can be positive or negative. I recall Lev Vygotsky's notion of ZOPED: *Zone of proximal development*. A teacher draws a pupil into a proximal stage of development which could not be reached by the pupil alone, but that does not work if the pupil is not ready for that stage. This can work negatively but surely is mostly positive.

The seeking of such influence on others, and strategic behaviour, are inevitable in life, happen all the time in daily life, and contribute to 'creative destruction', the flourishing of life. The striving of Jürgen Habermas (1982, 1984) for discourse without power (*Herrschaftsfreie Diskussion*) is

both illusory and undesirable. However, power relations should not become fixed, institutionalized and unassailable, which would yield repression, and there should remain freedom of opposition, of seeking counter-power. Such counter-power need not depend only on the individual, but may be based on coalitions. That, I think, is the crux of democracy. To be fair to Habermas, perhaps this is what he intended. I would add to Foucault that mutual opposition of power is not just an inevitable fact of life, of the nature of humanity, and consistent with freedom, but is also a source of development and flourishing of the self. It is fundamentally part of what Foucault called 'technologies of the self'. The purpose of this book may be seen as showing how that works.

The boundary between positive and negative power is not always easy to draw. Suppose you want to criticize a friend, which you can afford to do because you are a friend and want to help him or her out of a bind. How do you know that you are really helping, not trying to impose your righteousness, to engage in rivalry, or to establish your superiority? To begin with one should ask oneself these questions while embarking on it. But the stronger answer lies in the possibility for your friend to set you right. A keen response, a clash if needed, can yield clarity.

Simone de Beauvoir (1995, p. 132) put the question: should one try to stop someone who is at the point of committing suicide, with force if needed? Her conclusion is: yes, provided one subsequently also takes responsibility for what happens next, not leaving the other in the lurch. In other words, the negative power of restraining the other should be accompanied by the positive power of helping to find a new perspective.

In the economy, Schumpeterian entrepreneurs exercise power in 'creative destruction', and when that innovation is 'competence destroying' established firms exercise power to block it in order to protect their current investments. It is a task of government to allow and constrain both, to prevent destruction that is socially harmful (the mafia also engages in creative destruction) as well as the blocking of socially desirable innovation. In markets, there is both competition and collaboration between firms. In competition they seek to reduce others' options, and in collaboration they seek to develop new joint options. In collaboration there are also power relationships in creating mutual dependence, and even in the best of collaboration there seldom is an exact balance of dependence and hence power, though there is a willingness to go a long way through give and take and a commitment to the relationship by tolerating and not misusing some measure of unequal power: to use dialogue as the default and the exit only as the option of last resort. The point for governance is to maintain freedom of access and exit from markets and relationships.

Power is to be analysed not only at the individual level but also at the level of collectives such as markets, professions, industries, regions, states and nations. In other words, power is also systemic (cf. Niebuhr 1934).

Institutions and culture in symbiosis with economic systems produce what Said (1994) called 'structures of reference and attitude' that shape and rule representations, establish views of the world and rationalize or occlude abuses of power. Or, to use Wittgenstein's phrase, they establish the rules of language games. This is evident in imperialism but also in economic and political structures within states: in the tacit assumptions of economic, social, educational and cultural policy. Suppression or exploitation becomes culturally sanctioned and immune to criticism, expelled from the arena of critical discourse. This has been argued also by Adorno and Foucault, among others. An example in the economy is the remarkably robust system of robbery in financial markets that manifested itself in the financial crisis of 2008. Bankers hold governments and populations hostage to their profits and rewards in bonuses, with populations carrying the risks while they take the revenues, and they manage to maintain this under an ideological rhetoric of the market that hides its perverse incentives. Individual responsibility is eclipsed by market forces and prisoner's dilemmas.

This is not just a matter of mentality but also of structures of interdependence in which people and organizations get caught and which yield unintended consequences. Next to individual action, or as carriers of it, social structures, network phenomena, prisoner's dilemmas and the like affect the options and choices of people in both negative (constraining) and positive (enabling) ways, and in that sense exert power. Managers and administrators may be compelled to go against their individual conscience in order to satisfy the institutional interests attached to their position and role.

Beyond social structure people are also drawn into and made subservient to tacit assumptions, notions, views, customs, expectations and moral rules that are part of the culture of organizations, communities, nations or even humanity as a whole. This relates to 'cultural structures of reference and attitude'. and what Foucault (1988) called 'power of habit'. If it is odd to use the word 'power' for such anonymous, unintentional influence, perhaps we should find another word for it. Of course cultural constraints not only constrain but also enable. Anything that enables also constrains, but we can try to enlarge the first and reduce the latter.

In all cases, at all levels, power becomes evil when it refuses independence, thwarts inherent potential and blocks exit or entry: when it locks in or locks out. And how, then, can one escape? One can try to exercise counter power with arguments, or by crafting coalitions. That is the way of democracy. However, arguments will often not work because they go against what is taken as self-evident, the cultural structures of reference and attitude. In the Soviet-Union critics were seen as lunatics and locked away in asylums. Perhaps one can then step out to follow one's own path, often at a high price, leaving employment, emigrating, going underground, risking ostracism and possibly ending up in the stagnation of isolation. That is what entrepreneurs, artists, intellectuals, and writers do. That was also the

ultimate way out for Foucault: build your own life as a work of art. This can entail a difficult trade-off between shameful conformism and delusional solipsism where the self robs itself of the other.

Imperialism, the endeavour to practise over there what one has developed here, can be a step on a path towards transformation and learning, as I argue in Chapter 5, but it succeeds in this path only if it fails to impose itself there and is forced to adapt and break its familiar social structures and cultural systems of reference and attitude. Imperialism triumphs only when it is defeated. Here again, locking oneself up in one's own sphere is debilitating for the self. And so I return to the central argument of this book: dominance, in imposing views and practices on people, is ultimately self-defeating. At all levels power should remain open to opposition. That is part of horizontal transcendence.

### Pluralism

One might expect that opening up to the other and immersion in the other would lead to mental or spiritual homogenization or evening out, a decrease of cognitive distance. In fact we see an ongoing or increasing pluralism of views and opinions, in diverse religions, varieties within religions and alternative sources of spirituality (Joas 2007). Conversely, one might then expect that pluralism in combination with openness leads to relativism. We do observe such relativism. Is it acceptable? Is it workable? Don't we search for a direction, a striving for something, a committing ourselves to something in which we believe and that is not as good as any other goal? Yes, but why should that goal be the same for all?

One can be open to others and yet take one's own conviction seriously. If one cannot be convinced by others one should stick to one's own conviction. Debate with others can deepen that conviction. Tested on the views of others it may stand stronger. Learning can lead to transformation but also to confirmation of conviction. As long as pluralism goes together with otherhumanism it also goes together with vitality, not evening out, neither mutual isolation nor relativism. If one claims that moral conviction in its nature must be universalistic and therefore cannot bear diversity, then I refer to my discussion (pp. 000–000) on the sparsity of abstraction, and the provisional nature and changeability of universals.

There can be unity in diversity, where unity is based on shared views and openness of discussion (instead of violence), empathy, and respect, even awe for the other. We see individuality in diversity everywhere in daily life. Every organization has its own culture and 'focus' of goals, knowledge, style and views of the world and of relationships between people in the organization, though also connected to the surrounding culture of wider society. Like the difference between people, the difference between firms, even within a given industry, is a basis for both efficiency and innovation in the economy.

## Evolution

Can otherhumanism be reconciled with our instinct for self-preservation inherited from evolution? It is clear that from evolution our species carries such an instinct for self-preservation, survival and procreation that drive us to expand and protect our means of existence; and it is a source of egoism. However, at the same time it is now widely agreed that there are also arguments that point to an instinctive, genetically inherited inclination to 'seeking companionship, imitation of group members, some disposition towards reciprocity, avid learning of arbitrary group norms and some commitment to enforcing these norms in other group members' (Hurford 2007, p. 300). This inclination yields some basis for altruism, which I define as the willingness to make sacrifices, within bounds, for others or for a community, even if the losses exceed the gains. As defined in Chapter 4, enlightened self-interest can entail sacrifices, in give and take, but on the condition that there is a net gain or at least not a net loss in resources, while altruism entails acceptance of a net loss. Altruism is not boundless: one can be altruistic within limits, without self-denial. I define benevolence more broadly as including altruism but going further than making material sacrifice in a spiritual opening to the other and the willingness and capability to accommodate one's identity, feelings and knowledge without thereby surrendering or dissolving the self.

The human being thus has two instinctive inclinations, self-preservation and altruism, which often clash. When it comes to the crunch, the urge of self-preservation is usually the strongest, and there are limits to altruism, though it is nonsense to deny the existence of altruism on the ground that it has limits. We should be happy that it exists, even if it is limited.

Evolutionary theory gives several arguments for how altruism can have evolved. It is viable in evolution if it is not quickly selected out in competition with more selfish people or groups. The most obvious and most widely accepted argument, which remains close to the logic of individual selection and the 'selfish gene', is that of selection on the basis of kin (kin selection). Individuals are prepared to make sacrifices to others to the extent that they are related genetically, i.e. more so for one's own children and less so for cousins, since this contributes more to the proliferation of one's own genes.

More widely, in 'inclusive fitness' one can be altruistic to people who are to some extent similar in genetic endowment without being kin, if one can identify such people on the basis of similarity in appearance or of conduct to people with whom one already has an altruistic relationship. In other words: people discriminate. The tragedy is that according to evolutionary logic altruism within groups can only exist in combination with discrimination of outsiders. Is that in our genes? I consider it likely, but as far as I know it has not been proved experimentally.

This is not all. Instinctively or in rational deliberation one can employ the principle of 'tit for – tat': collaborate and make sacrifices as long as the other does, and retaliate when he or she does not ('defects'). More effective, and still viable, is 'forgiving tit for tat', where now and then one forgives defections and does not revert to retaliation but continues collaboration. This opens up the possibility of escaping from a deadlock of mutual retaliation. This is still a matter of enlightened self-interest.

A key question now is to what extent there can be altruism without guarantee or expectation of a reward or reciprocation, and without any kinship. The spread and maintenance of such altruism requires group selection next to individual selection. The idea, already harboured by Darwin, is that mutual sacrifice aids survival of the group. The problem with it is that transmission of genes operates through individuals, not groups. If at any time there is a sufficient number of altruists then the group is vulnerable to invasion by opportunists who prey upon altruists without reciprocating, and thereby have more means to compete, survive and procreate, so that in the long run the opportunists replace the altruists. However, altruism can survive if opportunists can be identified and a sufficient number of altruists are prepared to engage in punishment of opportunists even if that yields them a net loss. We appear to be helped in this by an instinct for detecting cheaters. For a good observer cheating may be revealed in posture, movement, gestures, facial expression, dilation of pupils, discomfort, voice and even smell (on the basis of pheromones), unless the villain is mentally disturbed or has a malfunction of brain mechanisms attached to guilt and compassion. In Chapter 5 I discussed how people develop skills in identifying intentions and feelings from people's expressions and movements. However, if cheating is difficult to detect and there are not enough people willing to engage in punishment, then the group may have to fall back on discrimination on the basis of appearance or origin.

While prejudice and discrimination may subside in times of prosperity, in adversity people may be thrown back on it. As I suggested before, under duress trust will erode. This may be exploited in a shrewd manipulation by populists or demagogues who insinuate that cheating is rampant amongst a suspect class (e.g. Jews, Moroccans). The condition that this is difficult to prove can be used to make it look even more sinister.

An instinct of prejudice against outsiders, if indeed it exists, is more effective for evoking internal loyalty and sacrifice if it is accompanied by a blind hatred that urges violence even to former friends and neighbours, if they are outsiders, even at high costs to the self. In the bombardment of Sarajevo, during the wars in the former Yugoslavia, hospitals were bombarded where one might want to be taken if one was wounded oneself. How can an instinct for benevolence be thus perverted? One way to generate blind hatred and violence against outsiders is to lift prejudice to a level where one is no longer afraid of death. Violence against outsiders then becomes part

of vertical transcendence. And here we arrive at the interaction between evolution and culture.

### Culture

Earlier, in Chapter 2, I characterized culture in the anthropological sense as a system of opinions and views that give content, direction and limits to goals, norms, thought and action. These are largely tacit, unconscious and acquired in education and all manner of socialization. There is culture at multiple levels: family, neighbourhood, association, organization, party, club, nation, etc. Because cultural, mental and spiritual framing is largely unconscious it can easily lead to prejudice and incomprehension. Culture can then form a major obstacle to empathy and benevolence. Another meaning of culture is that in contrast with nature it is manmade and therefore is more easily changed than human nature. In contrast with instincts, we can, in due course, bend culture to the advantage of empathy and benevolence, and culture may bend the thrust of instinct.

If it is true that the human being has an instinct for self-preservation as well as an instinct for altruism in the groups it belongs to, and if the latter is accompanied by an inclination towards suspicion of outsiders, then measures are needed for peace and collaboration between different communities and nations. One measure that goes back a long way is that of exogamous groups: marriage within communities is prohibited and marriage across communities binds them. This is a clever device to mobilize the altruism towards kin, in kin selection, to normalize and stabilize relations between groups. This is also how we can understand the role of marriages across royal families. However, another though not necessarily conflicting interpretation is that family that are married off serve as hostages that enforce peace.

Another clever device is growth of prosperity from trade and collaboration between nations so that it is in the interest of material well-being and survival to maintain peace and forbearance. This was the main idea behind the European Union. But then, if this source of prosperity breaks down, then so will the readiness for solidarity outside nations.

In earlier civilizations the reciprocal giving of gifts was used to cement and stabilize intergroup relationships, and we still find that even in daily social relations between people, as when people reciprocate invitations, Christmas cards and the giving of flowers.

Can, should, culture shape morality? Schopenhauer denied any role to the state for shaping morality because he believed that the will is autonomous, part of an immutable character, so that all the state can do is constrain the negative effects of the will by limiting access to the means for exercising bad will. In Chapter 4 I argued that while there is no free will in the sense that at any moment we cannot control the will, we can influence choices consciously and we can affect the future development of the will. For this I used

the evolutionary theory of cognitive development or neural Darwinism. Neural structures that underlie cognitive processes are developed by an evolutionary process of more or less random variety generation, in neural connections, that are selected and reinforced on the basis of felt success. Moral discourse and reward and punishment can affect the felt success of actions and thereby affect neural development, as well as the structures of the will.

Earlier I argued against genetic determinism. Evolutionary arguments concerning genes and the selection of their carriers are important, but they are not exclusive. If we claim that a certain conduct has a biological basis in our genes then we should give arguments as to how it could have survived under selective pressures. However, such arguments also have their limitations. They do not tell us how genes 'express' themselves under the influence of interaction between genes among each other and with the environment, inside and outside the body. Genetic arguments in the sense of arguments in terms of genes are not yet genetic arguments in the sense of how conduct develops. Social and cultural conditions can further, constrain or bend the expression of genes individually and in combination with each other. As Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2008, p. 236, footnote 15) writes: 'what is evolutionarily given is culturally played out'. This confirms the importance of education for moral conduct, and the importance of institutions. There are also implications for the role of culture in the conduct of adults. Earlier I indicated how demagogues can whip up suspicion, prejudice and hatred against outsiders on the basis of ethnic or religious sources of emotion. In the interaction between genes and culture there are roots of both good and evil.

Let us return to the discussion of the viability of altruism. We can and do set up institutions for the detection and punishment of opportunists by means of the law and its agencies. These institutions are paid for from collective means (tax). Thus we are not entirely dependent on the detective skills and voluntary sacrifice of altruists to fight defection. Such institutions, however, are seldom watertight, and instincts can sneak their way through the gaps. But then we also have ethics and morality. In this book I have tried to develop an ethic of other-directedness. But this also will not be entirely up to the force of instincts. Let us therefore look a little more deeply into the interaction between instincts and culture.

Sheets-Johnstone (2008) gives a closer argumentation for the cultural elaboration of instincts. The human being has a genetically determined inclination, an instinct, for tuning and empathy to others, as a possible basis for benevolence, the realization of which depends on how children are cared for and how they are educated. At the same time, from fear of death, people have the inclination to invent and follow myths of immortality. It is not clear whether this also is embodied in genes or is a cultural outcome of self-consciousness. The inclination or instinct towards myth can be hijacked

for violent aggressive use against groups with competing myths. It seems that the human being also has a genetically determined inclination towards male-to-male competition and surrender to the winner. We see this in everyday life in the monkey business of corporate boardrooms. This instinct also can be captured to enforce submission and loyalty to the 'alpha male'.

An instinctive potential for empathy is trained and brought to bear in the social context of child care shared between mother and grandmothers, aunts and siblings, where the infant has to observe, interpret and assess expressions and actions. Here also childcare is crucial for otherhumanism.

In a further elaboration of the urge towards myths of immortality Sheets-Johnstone emphasizes, and here we are dealing with something that is often neglected, that in people the primordial awareness of the body as vulnerable and mortal evokes an existential anguish and a strong urge to take refuge in ways to circumvent or bend that anguish in myths of immortality and corresponding rituals and sacrifice, in the worship of forebears, spirits or gods, and the belief in a hereafter, or in ideologies in which the human being thinks it is able to transcend itself in dedication, self-sacrifice even, to something bigger than itself and than life, something more durable than itself, such as national identity, fascism or communism. Is that what happened in the former Yugoslavia, on the basis of sentiments that went back to a lost battle against Ottoman Muslims 600 years ago? Such events contribute to my deep suspicion of vertical transcendence. Killing others in the name of a myth of the superiority and immortality of a nation or ideology engenders feelings of immortality by proxy and legitimates cruelty.

This goes further. Geometry, abstraction, universality, generality, spirituality, reason, clarity and light, as in the Enlightenment, are sought, I propose, for their association with the immortal, the timeless, the unchangeable and incorruptible. They are cousins of God and the immortal soul. This goes back, of course, to Plato and his ideas, and persists all through the history of philosophy.

They are also associated with the masculine. Men have always managed to appropriate them. Finesse, ambiguity, individuality, specificity, complexity, entanglement, concreteness and context dependence are associated with the contingent, unstable, fickle, dark, ambiguous, vulnerable, impure, corporeal and earthly, which are all attributed to the feminine. This feeds the distinction between on the one hand culture, which produces abstraction, categorization, universals, reason, clarity, etc., and on the other hand nature, which is dark, unpredictable, ambiguous, irresponsible, erratic, arbitrary and dangerous. Culture (and the male) is there to subdue nature (and the feminine). Men are afraid of women as they are of death. Is this connected to Schopenhauer's misogyny?

According to Sheets-Johnstone (2008) the evolutionary inheritance of man-man competition, as part of sexual selection, found also in animals, is still found in an inclination of men to compete in order to gain the upper

hand in power and access to females. With animals the urge of competition often leads to violence, though dominance and submission of their victims is the aim, not their death. However, with animals there is also a certain relish in the exercise of violence. Now according to Sheets-Johnstone, in contrast with animals, in human beings the urge to compete for power and submission has been hijacked in several ways. A more benevolent form is competition in sport and games. We also encounter it in the urge towards status and power in organizations, markets, politics and science. Perhaps here lies the source of Nietzschean will to power. It also seems to lie at the root of markets and competition in the economy. Who obtains the highest bonus? The other side of the urge is to submit to the winner. Does this connect with Nietzsche's 'slave mentality'? Does this also bring members of supervisory boards to submit to excessive urges of the managers they are supposed to supervise to expand and to take risks and to tolerate unproductive acquisitions?

More ominously, and of greater systematic importance, in the present book, is the mobilization of this urge to compete and then submit to the winner, complementing the urge discussed above towards the defence and celebration of myths of immortality in defending faith, culture or political ideology by blindly following the leader. The ruthlessness of the leader does not reduce this, by making the leader suspect, but enhances it, in establishing his alpha status.

The idea is that here, in these mutually reinforcing urges, lie the roots of mass slaughter and persecution through the ages – the battles between tribes to defend the spirits of forebears; crusades and pogroms; 20th-century wars for the sake of fascism and communism; ethnic and religious barbarity in the former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda and the Congo; Islamic terrorism; military intervention in Iraq. This descent of violence runs through the male, though women goad and cheer the men along.

In summary, it seems that here we are facing a pitch black syndrome of a genetic endowment for in-group loyalty combined with out-group discrimination, a thirst for vertical transcendence in myths of immortality and cultural exaptation of male–male competition.

### Development

Now I turn to the positive side: how can instincts be guided in a benevolent direction through education? I have already mentioned the positive side of culture in the form of literature (including plays, opera, film and popular culture). Next to drives of selfishness, dominance, submission and violence, people also have natural roots of empathy and trust in the processes of mutual adjustment between selves. This can be nurtured in parent–child relations, in child's play and education. This is of crucial importance for the viability of otherhumanism.

As already indicated in Chapter 5, according to Sheets-Johnstone (2008) attunement is built up in rough and tumble play where, by bumping into each other, children explore the vulnerability and robustness of their bodies, and thereby that of others. This is no random, senseless activity. It helps children to engage in attunement and thereby develop the capability for empathy.

According to Sheets-Johnstone infants have a natural inclination to openness to other beings, shown in a smile that they offer early, as an expression of pleasure. Children also have a natural disposition to play, which gives a basis for creativity as a spontaneous urge and which is not aimed at self-interest or dominance. On the other hand according to Sheets-Johnstone children also have a natural startle reflex when confronted with unusual events or appearances, as in 'stranger anxiety', as a normal disposition to flee or defend from an awareness of vulnerability. This feeds fear, which first can yield a reflex to retreat, but which can also be transformed into anger and attack on the source of the fear. Thus there is a natural disposition to openness and benevolence as well as rejection and aggression. In personal development, both can be stimulated and developed as well as suppressed.

I disagree with Sheets-Johnstone where she makes a stark contrast between child's play and competition between adults. Of course they are different, but I think they are also related. Her view is as follows. While empathic understanding is supported by child's play, it is drowned out in competition that is 'one-dimensionally self-interested' and aimed at 'winning, winning at any price' (p. 242). According to her, a premature shift from child's play to adult competition 'shunts their attention from the care and survival of others in concert with their own to a quest for dominance over others' (p. 247). I think that here child's play is romanticized and competition receives too dim a view. In the relevant literature opinions vary on how far rough and tumble play can also be competitive and aggressive, aimed at dominance or fighting to win. If male-male aggression were indeed instinctive, as Sheets-Johnstone argues elsewhere, wouldn't it show early in child behaviour? During play children seem easily able to shift to competitive action, where outside intervention is often needed to revert them back to play. And according to her own analysis, empathy only develops later, after bodily attunement in rough and tumble play. It seems clear that in play children not only explore the boundaries of safety and vulnerability of their bodies and those of others, but also the boundaries of pain by accident, and of hurt by purpose, dominance and submission, give and take, which lay the basis for the exercise of 'voice', in the expression of protest and resistance, and of negotiation of the terms for resolving conflict. Thus they learn the scripts of both collaboration and competition.

Conversely, adult competition also has its benevolent side. It can express a joy of challenge and response; it can lead to creativity and new insight and to a new ability for empathy and the resolution of conflict. There can

be mixes of competition and collaboration. Rivalry can be playful, even benevolent.

There is an important connection between play/exploration and learning/innovation. I have argued for a cycle of discovery in which a playful disposition to apply existing practices in new contexts (generalization) plays a crucial role. In contrast to sport, in play there are no prior, externally imposed rules, and rules are made as part of the play, and this gives room for exploration. Exploration and innovation require a loosening of rules and certainties. In exploration there is surprise that is part of play, and which can generate laughter, but there is also an increased risk of vulnerability that can be a source of crying. Exploration can arise from play but also from pressures of competition or survival. Thus they can lie close to each other, no matter how different their patterns of movement and expression may be.

Thus I propose that the opposition between play and competition is a false one, from childhood onwards, both in fact and in theory. Play can consist of shifting combinations of rivalry and collaboration. A boundary is crossed when fear shifts into anger and aggression, and competition turns into battle. This issue, which merits much more phenomenological research, reflection and discussion, is important here to establish the connection between the flourishing of life and benevolence.

In summary, from evolution we have inherited natural capacities for empathy and benevolence, loyalty to groups, as well as inclinations to egoism, defence of our resources and the will to dominate others by means of violence, particularly against outsiders. Both instincts can be enhanced and curtailed by cultural, social and institutional conditions in education and schooling. Otherhumanism is both viable and vulnerable.

### **How far does the art of trust go?**

After the question as to which obstacles and aids for otherhumanism we have been endowed with in evolution and personal development, the question now concerns how far it can work in practical interaction between self and other. This depends closely on the opportunities and limitations of trust. Earlier, I gave a clarification of the notion and the practice of trust. Here I explore in more detail the limits of it and the ways in which people deal with it. Can trust exist, and in economic relationships? And if so, how does it work?

Supposing we know the value of benevolence and we want to commit ourselves to it, then what if the other does not have the insight or the will? And if we can convince the other, with the arguments set out above, of the good that benevolence can bring through self-realization and self-transcendence, is that enough for people to learn and practise it? Are they capable of it? And if so when? What then are the self and the other up against? What risk is there that we become a victim or victimize others? What can we do about that? We

may be sincerely convinced that we will honour commitments to others and yet succumb to temptations or pressures not to do so nearer the time.

Earlier, in Chapter 9, I indicated that there are limits to trustworthiness, depending on temptations and pressures of survival. Unlimited resistance to such pressures is too much to ask, and wisdom requires that we face it and are able to understand and forgive people when they cannot resist. This is part of the required empathy. We can, however, resist temptation to some extent and discover thereby that we can gain more than we lose.

It has repeatedly been shown in experimental game theory that in fact people more often go for fair solutions than for individually optimal outcomes. A classic case is that of the 'ultimatum game'. Suppose one has €10 to share between oneself and another. One has to offer the other a share, and if the other accepts one can keep the rest; but if he or she rejects the offer, one gets nothing. The individually optimal solution is to offer little, because for the other it is always better to accept and get something than to refuse and get nothing. In fact, people mostly opt for the 50/50 solution, more or less.

From interaction with various of entrepreneurs I have learned that often they are aware of the need to collaborate with others, in view of the limited resources of small firms and the uncertainty of innovation, and are quite willing to commit to honest give and take, and to be trustworthy. However, often this stance is toppled by the drive of independent entrepreneurs to go their own stubborn, opinionated way, which is why they opted for independence in the first place, pride in personal achievement and the challenge of rivalry. They are not likely to trot in tune like a team of horses. It is not from a drive towards survival, which they jeopardize all the time, in their eagerness to take risks. They are Nietzschean in their will to manifestation of the self. Here, the flourishing of the self is not easy to combine with that of the other, but some coaching can facilitate collaboration.

Earlier I showed the importance of openness for trust and for the relation between self and other more generally. However, if openness is imposed, in a demand for transparency, this is seen as a show of distrust. This is tricky because distrust evokes reciprocal distrust, in a vicious circle where distrust escalates. Furthermore, an increase of rules and controls reduces intrinsic motivation, and that motivation reduces the need for rules. The more rules there are, the less the inclination there is to feel responsible for what has not been regulated. Hence here also there is a vicious circle of rules that evoke dodging behaviour that necessitates further rules. Rules cannot in practice rule everything. Professional practice is too rich and variable – in its dependence on context and corresponding needs to adjust, which contributes to its quality – to allow for canonical (i.e. complete and exact) rules. Openness should be as much voluntary as possible. However, that must be earned by the controller by not in the first instance using the openness as a basis for administering blame but to give room for repair and learning to lessen

future failure, in the exercise of *voice*. Granting professional leeway, to be earned by voluntary openness also concerning one's errors, is part of what is called 'horizontal control', which contributes to the practice of horizontal transcendence.

Benevolence can be false, insincere, as a pose to avoid conflict and to present oneself as better than one is, perhaps from cowardice, lack of genuine commitment to the function one has or the organization where one works, or the relationship one is engaged in, or lack of self-confidence or a narcissistic urge to self-confirmation. Criticism is not voiced but finds its way in indirect sanctions or in passing the problem onto a third party. The other then has no grip on what is happening and no opportunity to defend him or herself or improve his or her conduct. The penalty for such insincere behaviour is loss of intentional trust that is difficult to repair. It is questionable whether this penalty is sufficient to prevent such insincerity. Fashionable rhetoric of trust can increase it, in pretence of trust against all odds, which reinforces the existing inclination to narcissism (Lasch 1991). Thus it is possible that an emerging rhetoric of trust flips into a massive loss of trust. This accentuates the requirement of openness and 'voice' for trust and the insight that trust is not being nice to each other but also of setting each other right with criticism or complaint precisely because there is trust.

The other must also be given the opportunity to say no to a relationship with me, and to end an existing relationship, no matter how much I think that would be to his or her own disadvantage. The decision is up to the other. Without such opportunity for 'exit' trust would entail slavery and an abuse of power.

However, there are hard/aggressive and soft/benevolent forms of exit. In the hard form one prepares one's defection in silence to prevent the other from blocking one: one then drops the bomb at the moment of exit. The soft form is to employ voice even in exit. One announces exit amply ahead of time, with the offer of jointly preparing measures to minimize damage for the other and helping him to go on. Of course the other's feelings of loss may impede this.

Well known is the asymmetry between a mind frame of gain and one of loss. In the sight of impending loss people often go to extremes of conduct than when the perspective is one of gain. If a partner defects with great loss for the other, the latter may resort to expensive lawsuits without any chance of success. This implicit threat tends to stabilize relationships: those who suffer loss will go to greater extremes to keep the partner than the partner will do who wants to exit from the relationship for greater gain.

As discussed in Chapter 9, social psychology shows that in making their decisions people employ a repertoire of decision heuristics. These yield prejudice and impulsiveness that disturb trust but which can also lead to a stabilization and continuation of relationships in spite of impulses to end them. In my discussion of scripts I noted that once the script of

a relationship has been established events are interpreted in terms of that script, and this anchors conduct.

Lack of self-confidence, fear of being the weakest party, can yield excessive distrust and breed an expectation of opportunism that can easily be confirmed when something goes awry, because of the causal ambiguity of trust discussed earlier. When something goes awry this can be interpreted as deliberate opportunism rather than an accident, a shortfall of competence or a lack of attention or dedication. Again we see how important openness is, in which the other explains what and why something goes wrong before the rot of suspicion sets in. Third parties also can help to resolve causal ambiguity. On the other hand an excess of self-confidence can lead to a neglect of relational risk.

As also indicated earlier, benevolence and empathy are physically enabled by the operation of mirror neurons and oxytocin. Of the latter it has been shown that it increases trust exhibited in a greater willingness to incur relational risk, and not by merely reducing the avoidance of risk (Kosfeld et al. 2006). It has also been shown that cooperative behaviour yields activation of brain areas involved in the generation of dopamine and pleasure behaviour.

### Summary

There are factors that support benevolence, empathy, loyalty and 'voice', as well as factors that trigger concern for the self and 'exit'. This is what one would expect, and is indeed what is needed, to allow for both flourishing of the self and benevolence (in Nietzsche and Levinas). Earlier I indicated that otherhumanism does not demand that the self submit itself unconditionally, as Levinas proposed. We are reminded of Nietzsche's condemnation of the weaknesses of compassion that block the realization of potential, that breed mediocrity or give an excuse for it, and that then lay the blame on the other. The relation between self and other is full of both attraction and repulsion, commitment and freedom, compassion and rivalry. This is both the predicament and the opportunity for human being.

Perhaps the most important thing is to resist the instinct to get carried along with solidarity within a closed group to the point of considering it right, or a duty to the group, even a sacred duty, to discriminate against outsiders, to harm or even kill them, to protect the group. We should break the borders, open the group, and let the instinct for solidarity flow outside.

Let me summarize the good news:

- Otherhumanism is not hopeless. We are not empty-handed. We can build on a range of foundations of benevolence.
- It helps that we have mirror neurons as a neurological basis for empathy.
- It helps to develop empathy in the care and education of children.
- Perhaps having a pet is an exercise in non-verbal communication.

- We have no free will in the sense of full conscious control of our actions, but conscious thought and reason can influence it, in anticipation of consequences, in debate with others, in evaluation of the outcomes of actions, and in the development of our future dispositions.
- Literature helps as: an exercise in empathy, a moral laboratory, a simulation of the possible consequences of actions, a celebration of individuality and a delivery from the tyranny of universals.
- We can, in literature or our surroundings, find heroes or sages that provide exemplars of the virtues of benevolence, empathy, honesty and altruism while radiating the flourishing of their lives.
- It helps that collaboration with others who think and feel differently provides an economic advantage to learning and innovation.
- It helps that complex societies cannot function and survive without trust, collapsing when trust does. Without trust even language would not work.
- It helps that in economics and psychology there are factors that stabilize relationships, in spite of misleading economic rhetoric that celebrates egotism and maximal flexibility of relationships.
- It helps that, from evolution, next to an instinct to guard our resources for personal survival we also have an instinct for altruism, for satisfying moral codes and some ability to identify trespassers. We experience shame for our bad conduct. The dark side of this is that it may be limited to one's own group and also yields the potential to be mobilized in violent hatred towards outsiders.
- We can develop the art of trust, in openness, voice, voluntary transparency, granting the benefit of doubt, give and take, and allowing room for intrinsic motivation by which one can relax rules.
- We can stimulate the development of go-betweens who are masters in the art of trust.
- As pleaded by Nussbaum (2006) we could consider instituting a social service, instead of military service, in which young people are obliged to work for a while in care, for example, as an exercise in empathy and benevolence, and to learn that tax spent on care is money well spent. This may also contribute to a solution of the shortage and high cost of personnel in that area.

### **The crunch**

What when it comes to the crunch? Where does otherhumanism stall and fall? What if the other demands compassion for which the self must relinquish the realization of its own potential? When a spouse no longer hears any music in the marriage but wants to spare the children from the anguish of a divorce? I don't know the answer and I doubt that there is any universal answer. Perhaps there is the possibility of a voice mode of exit. Staying together may be worse for the children, when antipathy turns into venom.

Realization of the self is not necessarily at odds with commitment to the other, and self-transcendence may require it. Compassion can contribute more to the elevation of the soul than extricating the self for a solitary striving. But it depends on the motives of the other. It may be, as Nietzsche indicated, that the other has perverse motives hidden in a moral coercion of compassion or is lost in envy, a vengeance for its own weakness, a will to dominate or narcissistic manipulation. When none of this is the case, and suffering is deep and sincere, the self can feel itself compelled to compassion and achieve spiritual growth from it. Nietzsche rejected the avoidance of all suffering because suffering can be part, perhaps is an unavoidable part, of the development and transcendence of the self. And if that applies to one's own suffering, why not also for the suffering of the other? By accepting and adopting the suffering of the other, with the commitment of all means, one may elevate the self more than by engaging in battle by and for oneself.

But what if the other has no insight or feeling for the beneficence of benevolence, or is overwhelmed by fury, an irresistible urge to manipulate, dominate, conquer, persecute, violate, maim or kill? One can rationally try 'tit for tat' or 'forgiving tit for tat'. In the end one may only be able to resort to acceptance of death as a liberation.

Recall the story of the master and the slave. In the end the master is the loser. He can afford to impose his will, indulge in coercion, even cruelty, and thereby lack the opposition needed to test and correct the self and learn. The slave becomes a master in empathy and adjustment, clever in manipulation, avoidance and withdrawal into freedom of thought. At death, a suppressive master is caught in the terror of his void; the slave is released from the plenitude of his suffering.

What, then, if one is overwhelmed by terror, persecution and slaughter? What is the force of otherhumanism in the face of such inhumanity. What when one is overwhelmed by contingency in an airline crash? I have no right or basis for opinions here, since I haven't experienced either. Perhaps I would burst into prayer to a non-existent God.

## Notes

### 1 Introduction

1. Kunneman (2009) attributes the term 'horizontal transcendence' to Irigaray.
2. As I will discuss later, this is closer to Levinas's earlier than to his later thought.
3. This has been elaborated in my earlier work (Nooteboom, 2000).

### 2 Which Avenues?

1. In *The Republic, the Statesman, and the Laws*.

### 4 Free Will?

1. Arendt also made a distinction, less successful in my view, between 'labour' and 'work', which I will not adopt here.
2. There are also political libertarians, but that is something different.
3. See Nooteboom (1984) for an argument, with a simple little mathematical model, how in retailing preferences may be non-transitive in an attempt to trade off utilities of proximity, convenience, service, opening times and price.
4. There is a 'Smith problem' in the claim that there is a contradiction between Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*; but Powell (2010) shows that upon further scrutiny this is hardly the case.

### 5 Embodied Cognition

1. Cf. Henderson and Clark (1990). Examples of the role of such hybrids in the history of technology are given in Mokyr (1990) and Nooteboom (2000).
2. In economic parlance: knowledge has both increasing and decreasing returns to scale.

### 6 Language

1. On this point I employ the insight from the so-called structuralists, like Saussure, with his dictum that a word means what other words don't mean. Quine spoke of a 'seamless web' of knowledge and meaning. Neurath spoke of repairing a boat, plank by plank, while remaining afloat in it.
2. The terminology of 'sender and receiver' is unfortunate because it carries the mistaken container metaphor of communication as the moving across the counter of rolls of bread with a given nutrient value that is the same to all receivers.

### 7 Nietzsche: The Flourishing of Life

1. While the term 'will to power' emerges as such only in Nietzsche's later work (*Zarathustra*), the content and logic of the notion play an important role in earlier work, e.g. in *Human, All Too Human*.

2. While Kaufmann (1968, p. 249) included creative spirit as a manifestation of will to power, he posited (p. 248) that it 'cannot be accurately described as either a will to affect others or as a will to "realize" oneself'. Here I disagree. While the term 'will to power' came up later in Nietzsche's work, and then may have referred primarily to self-overcoming, much of Nietzsche's earlier work discussed the 'lower' manifestations of that will, and I do not think he intended to repudiate that in his later work. Since for Nietzsche everything follows from will to power, so do the lower manifestations of it, as Kaufmann recognizes elsewhere.
3. Indeed, Nehamas (1985) argued that Nietzsche discussed nature in literary terms and intended his own work to be regarded as literature.
4. Unless I am mentally disabled and the connection between my amygdala and my prefrontal cortex does not work well, my mirror neurons don't work well or my production of oxytocin fails.

## 8 Levinas: Philosophy of the Other

1. As far as I know Levinas does not employ the work of Wittgenstein, Austin or Searle.
2. In French the title uses '*au-delà de l'essence*'. Here '*essence*' is not essence but something like being, but in a static sense. Since I have already used 'being' for better or worse I will now use 'existence'.
3. Even from the perspective of the 'selfish gene', reciprocal altruism is viable, though I would call that enlightened self-interest rather than altruism. The difference between self-interest and altruism was discussed in Chapter 4 (pp. 000–000).

## 9 Otherhumanism

1. Multiple dimensions of utility can, for example, lead to intransitive preferences (Nooteboom 1984).
2. Here I follow the argument from Emile Durkheim, with his notion of 'organic solidarity'.
3. I write this in French to honour the French philosophers who pleaded for difference: Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Irigaray, Glucksmann.
4. More technically, in terms of scripts: a different filling in of a node of the script, a change in the order of nodes, an introduction of a node from a different script.
5. For an empirical test, see Klein Woolthuis et al. (2011).
6. While at the individual level cognitive distance lies in differences between cognitive frames; at the level of organizations it lies in differences in organizational focus.

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